

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The
Greatest
Gamble

by Elizabeth
York Miller

*Author of
"Which of These Two," etc.*

10¢ PER
COPY

JANUARY 29

BY THE YEAR \$4.00



16-Inch

*All
Solid
pliable
high-
grade
chrome
tan
leather*

**Elmer
Richards Co.**
Dept. 2271 W. 35th St., Chicago

\$1.00
DOWN
Brings You
the Famous
"Winter King"

16 in. Men's High Cut Shoe

Just send the coupon and \$1.00 for
this splendid high cut shoe on approval. Money
back if you say so. Price has been cut in half.

**1/2
Price**

16 inches tall. Every inch selected, softest, pliable, tough,
storm proof, solid dark chrome tan leather. The best wear-
ing leather in the world and at the same time pliable and
easy on the feet. Full oak tanned double soles. Solid leather
heels. Bellows tongue, same superb quality tan leather. Full
vamp, runs all the way under toe cap. Leather counters.
Leather insole. Back seam reinforced. Two straps and buck-
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Sizes 6 to 11. Order by No. S-20. Be sure to give your
size. **\$1.00 cash, \$1.50 monthly. Total price \$9.95.**

**Six Months
to Pay**

Learn to buy the Elmer Richards way as thou-
sands of men are doing. 5 cents a day brings these
shoes. Don't miss this cut price sale.

Biggest Bargain of the Year

This shoe is a regular \$20.00 value sold to you
at half price. Don't be too late. The stock is limited.
Send the coupon now with a dollar bill or a \$1.00
P. O. order. Order Now!

Cut Price Coupon

Elmer Richards Co. Dept. 2271, W. 35th St. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Gentlemen: I enclose \$1.00. Please send Men's

16-Inch High Cut Shoe No. S-20. Size.....

If I am not satisfied when I receive the shoes, I can return
them, and get payment back with charges. Otherwise,
I will pay advertised price, \$1.00 with coupon,
\$1.50 monthly. Total price, \$9.95.

Name.....

Address.....

State.....

Look!

21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
Adjusted to the second—
Adjusted to temperature—
Adjusted to isochronism—
Adjusted to positions—
25-year gold strata case—
Montgomery Railroad Dial—
New Ideas in Thin Cases.



Only

\$

5⁰⁰
a Month

And all of this for \$5.00 per month — a great reduction in watch prices direct to you — a 21-jewel adjusted watch at a rock-bottom price. Think of the high grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. And, if you wish, you may pay this price at the rate of \$5.00 a month. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

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Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

Burlington Watch Co.

19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 1451 — Chicago, Ill.
Canadian Office: 338 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1451 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or \$5.00 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXX

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NUMBER 2

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THE publication of some novels is merely an incident in a magazine's life. The appearance of others is an **EVENT** in the literary world. February 5, 1921, will be a date to remember, for it marks the beginning of one of the big stories of the year.

PAWNED

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

Author of "The Miracle Man," "From Now On," "The Sin That Was His," etc.

BE SURE TO GET NEXT WEEK'S MAGAZINE
AND START IT AT THE BEGINNING

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

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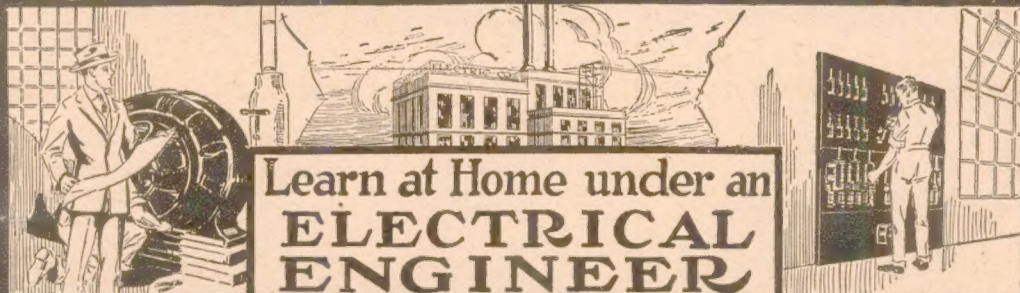
CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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Quick Success in Electricity!



Learn at Home under an
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Elec. Engineer**

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I am an authorized Electrical Engineer. So far as I know I am the only man with the degree Electrical Engineer to offer a Home Study Course in Electricity. My Electrical Engineering experience has covered a period of twenty-five years with some of the leading engineering and industrial corporations in this country. This wide and varied experience is the secret back of the success of my students.

Qualify to Fill One of These Big Paying Positions

Chief Electrician
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Wicks trained men succeed where other men fail because they are trained thoroughly from the ground up. They have been trained under an Electrical Engineer. They have the knowledge gained of 25 years of experience behind them. Wicks trained men can't go wrong—they know only one way to do things—the right way.

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Special
Rate



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My new easy method knocks out all the unnecessary frills and gives you *real practical electricity*—the money-making facts that you can cash in on. I teach *both why and how* through practical problems—the kind of problems you will meet later in your everyday work.

FREE Electrical Outfit and Tools

Big outfit containing material, apparatus and tools FREE. I know the value of the right kind of tools so I want my students to start out with the very tools they will need on the job. This outfit contains everything—there are no extras for you to buy.

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Just stop and think what electricity means to us in our everyday life and you will realize why there is such a big demand for electrically trained men. The whole world depends on the electrician. Electric Light Companies, Municipalities, Manufacturers and Contractors are paying bigger wages than ever and still need more men to fill big jobs.

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Send the coupon to me today—it will bring you my new big book "Opportunities in the Electrical Field." If you are interested in your own future you will want this book. I will also send you full particulars of my method of training—show you why Wicks training brings quick success. You will also find out about my Special Tuition Rate now in force. Act at once.

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Dept. 7161, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago
Without any obligation send me your Big New Book "Opportunities in the Electrical Field" and full particulars regarding your method of training.

Name Address City State



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$4.00
Argosy-Allstory	Weekly } 2.50	less 25% cash discount
Minimum space four lines.		

March 5th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Feb. 5th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

\$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 301, Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$50.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

MAKE MONEY Selling Steel Mantled Burners. Fit Ordinary Lamps. Increases light three times. Sample dozen lamp burners complete with wicks \$2.50, fully guaranteed. Particulars free. Steel Mantle Co., 4975 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SELL WORLD'S GREATEST AUTO INVENTION: No more rain blurred windshields; Mystic Chemical Felt works wonders; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours; steel mountings; fits pocket; whirlwind seller at \$1; Vetter made \$75 first day. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 309, Toledo, Ohio.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Company, Department 813, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

WE PAY \$10 A DAY for good live hustlers taking orders for Insyde Tyres inner armor for automobile tires. Guaranteed to give double tire mileage. Any tire. Prevents punctures and blow-outs. Enormous demand. Low priced. Big opportunity for the right man. Write quick for territory. American Accessories Co., E401, Cincinnati, Ohio.

BIG PROFITS IN SALESDOARDS. We will start you in this business for yourself. Absolutely no investment required. Novelty Jewelry Co., Dept. A, 118 N. LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill.

PORTRAIT OIL PAINTING STUDIO at home. \$5000 yearly. We start and teach you; furnish outfit. No experience or capital. A dignified business for business people. Tangley, 114 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS: SOMETHING NEW. WIRELESS GUARANTEED UMBRELLAS. Adjust new top in minute. Handles collapse to fit suitcase. Other features. Popular prices. Free sample. Parker Mfg. Co., 206 Dike Street, Dayton, Ohio.

MALE HELP

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, \$140-\$200. Colored Porters by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Ry. Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

MEN WANTED FOR DETECTIVE WORK. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former U. S. Govt. Detective, 107 St. Louis, Mo.

REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

LOOKING FOR A FARM? If you are, an opportunity is before you. Hardwood Land in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties, Michigan, at only \$15 to \$35 per acre. Small down payment, easy terms. Excellent location. Special features and ways of helping settlers. Write for big free booklet. Swigart Land Co., 11245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN: EARN \$3,500 TO \$10,000 A YEAR. City or Traveling. Experience unnecessary. Quickly qualify through our amazing System. Free Employment Service to Members. Send for Salesmanship book, list of lines and full particulars. Nat. Salesmen's Tr. Ass'n., Dept. 133-A, Chicago, Ill.

MEN WANTED—TO SELL "PERRY"—DEPENDABLE FRUIT TREES AND SHRUBBERY. Big demand. Complete cooperation. Commission paid weekly. Write for terms. Perry Nurseries, Brighton, N. Y.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTRY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Positions worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 771 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

WE WANT REPUTABLE SALES REPRESENTATIVES, wherever we have no dealer distribution, to sell U. S. Player Rolls in their spare time. A high-grade business with good profits. United States Music Co., 2929 W. Lake St., Chicago.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED. You can earn \$50.00 a week during spare time and your own clothes free by taking orders from our all wool Spring line of guaranteed tailoring. Our line is the largest and cheapest. Pre-war prices. Jay Rose & Co., 415 S. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

YOU CAN MAKE FROM \$25 TO \$75 PER WEEK DURING YOUR SPARE TIME by addressing envelopes. Not over \$10 capital required. Particulars free. McLardie & Myers, 424 Dakota, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

HELP WANTED

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 423, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Excellent opportunities for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1963 Broadway, New York.

WE WILL START YOU IN THE CLEANING AND DYEING BUSINESS. Little capital needed; big profits. Write for booklet. The Ben-Vonde System, Dept. F., Charlotte, N. C.

"GOVERNMENT JOBS," a book telling how to get U. S. Government positions. Send your name and address for free sample copy. Franklin Institute, Dept. G-1, Rochester, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—BIG PAY; EASY WORK; great demand everywhere; fine chance for travel; experience unnecessary; we show you. Write for free particulars. Write, Wagner, 186 East 79th Street, New York, Dept. 303.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



"You've Gone Way Past Me, Jim"

"Today good old Wright came to my office. All day the boys had been dropping in to congratulate me on my promotion. But with Wright it was different.

"When I had to give up school to go to work I came to the plant seeking any kind of a job—I was just a young fellow without much thought about responsibilities. They put me on the payroll and turned me over to Wright, an assistant foreman then as now. He took a kindly interest in me from the first. 'Do well the job that's given you, lad,' he said, 'and in time you'll win out.'

"Well, I did my best at my routine work, but I soon realized that if ever I was going to get ahead I must not only do my work well, but prepare for something better. So I wrote to Scranton and found I could get exactly the course I needed to learn our business. I took it up and began studying an hour or two each evening.

"Why, in just a little while my work took on a whole new meaning. Wright began giving me the most particular jobs—and asking my advice. And there came, also, an increase in pay. Next thing I knew I was made assistant foreman of a new department. I kept right on studying because I could see results and each day I was applying what I learned. Then there was a change and I was promoted to foreman—at good money, too.

"And now the first big goal is reached—I am superintendent, with an income that means independence, comforts and enjoyments at home—all those things that make life worth living.

"Wright is still at the same job, an example of the tragedy of lack of training. What a truth he spoke when he said today, 'You've gone 'way past me, Jim—and you deserve to.' Heads win—every time!"

Yes, it's simply a question of training. Your hands can't earn the money you need, but your head can if you'll give it a chance.

The International Correspondence Schools have helped more than two million men and women to win promotion, to earn more money, to know the joy of getting ahead in business and in life.

Isn't it about time to find out what they can do for you?

You, too, can have the position you want in the work of your choice, with an income that will make possible money in the bank, a home of your own, the comforts and luxuries you would like to provide your family. No matter what your age, your occupation, your education, or your means—you can do it!

All we ask is the chance to prove it—without obligation on your part or a penny of cost. That's fair, isn't it? Then mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS BOX 2184-B SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER | ☐ SALESMANSHIP |
| ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways | ☐ ADVERTISING |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Window Trimmer |
| ☐ Telegraph Engineer | ☐ Show Card Writer |
| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Sign Painter |
| ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER | ☐ Railroad Trainman |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ ILLUSTRATING |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Cartooning |
| ☐ Toolmaker | ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Private Secretary |
| ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER | ☐ BOOKKEEPER |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Stenographer and Typist |
| ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER | ☐ Cert. Public Accountant |
| ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER | ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER |
| ☐ Marine Engineer | ☐ Railway Accountant |
| ☐ Ship Draftsman | ☐ Commercial Law |
| ☐ ARCHITECT | ☐ GOOD ENGLISH |
| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Teacher |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ CIVIL SERVICE |
| ☐ Structural Engineer | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING | ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING |
| ☐ Sheet Metal Worker | ☐ Auto Repairing |
| ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. | ☐ Navigation |
| ☐ CHEMIST | ☐ AGRICULTURE |
| ☐ Mathematics | ☐ Poultry Raising |

☐ Spanish
☐ French
☐ Italian

Name _____
Present _____
Occupation _____
Street _____
and No. _____
City _____ State _____

Canadians may send this coupon to
International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

PAY NO CASH FOR THIS GREAT TAN STORM LEATHER BARGAIN! EXTRA HEAVY SOLE

Wears Like Iron
most unbelievable low bargain price. For built-in, wear-resisting qualities we challenge comparison with any work shoe costing half again as much. Heavy weight chrome tanned Elk leather, chock-full of comfort, yet made to wear and resist action of acids in soil, milk, manure, etc. Lace Blucher style, broad roomy toe, durable solid leather soles, sewed and nailed. Dirt excluding half bellows tongue. If not fully convinced of the remarkable value return shoes to us; we will refund your money.

This Work Shoe is the utmost in quality, style, fit and comfort at an almost unbelievable low bargain price. For built-in, wear-resisting qualities we challenge comparison with any work shoe costing half again as much. Heavy weight chrome tanned Elk leather, chock-full of comfort, yet made to wear and resist action of acids in soil, milk, manure, etc. Lace Blucher style, broad roomy toe, durable solid leather soles, sewed and nailed. Dirt excluding half bellows tongue. If not fully convinced of the remarkable value return shoes to us; we will refund your money.



ORDER AT OUR RISK
SEND FOR
FREE
CATALOG

\$4.65
Parcel Post Free

Simply Send Name and Size

UNDERPRICED MAIL ORDER HOUSE, F. Haverhill, Mass.

Send me.....pairs of this great bargain shoe, sizes.....
C. O. D. I shall accept them under your ironclad guarantee to return every cent if unsatisfactory.

Name.....

Address.....

NO MONEY
Now \$1.98
Pants
Guaranteed \$6.00 Value or Money Back
Made to Your Order
New wholesale tailoring house makes this sensational introductory offer—good for 30 days only. Perfect fitting excellent wearing pants of fine quality weave Worsted, guaranteed \$6.00 pre-war value or **MONEY BACK**. Any style or size, no extra charges. Parcel Post or Express **PREPAID**. Write today for 60¢ cloth samples **Free**.
One pair to a customer
Agents Wanted Big Money
Send orders for your relatives, friends and neighbors. Nice easy spare time work that pays you \$20 to \$40 a week. Send us your name today. Handsome cloth sample outfit and full information in first mail. Free. Write today.
STRAND TAILORING COMPANY
Baltimore, Md. Dept. 131

GET WELL—BE YOUNG—GROW TALL



This University discovery is the most important health invention of the century. It remakes and rejuvenates the human body. It produces normal spines. It frees impinged and irritated nerves, corrects contracted muscles, shortens ligaments, eliminates congestion, improves circulation and drainage of the body. It will increase the body's length.
THE PANDICULATOR CO., 1518 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, O.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

WANTED: COMPOSERS OF VERSE OR MUSIC to write at once. Brilliant opportunity for good talent. Address, Burrell Van Buren, L-13 Bush Temple Bldg., Chicago.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit Mss. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

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START AN EASY AND LUCRATIVE BUSINESS. We teach you how to establish a successful collection agency and refer business to you. No capital required. Little competition. Wm. P. Taylor, Buffalo, N. Y., writes, "Made gross commissions of over \$8,000.00 in 1918 and one day recently showed commissions of \$165.00." O. H. Overholser, Dayton, Ohio, writes, "Averaged over \$350.00 net monthly commissions last year." Start now in spare time. You can achieve the same success as 4,300 others. Write today for free "Pointers" and new plan. American Collection Service, 779 State Street, Detroit, Mich.

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy-Allstory, 280 Broadway, New York.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

INVENTIONS WANTED. CASH OR ROYALTY for ideas. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 181-A, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F. Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Conception Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PHOTOPLAYS

Ambitious Writers of Photoplays, Short Stories, Poems, Songs, send today for free, valuable instructive book "Key to Successful Writing," including 65 helpful suggestions on writing and selling. Atlas Publishing Co., 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE A SONG POEM—I compose music and guarantee publication. Send poem today. E. Hanson, 3810 Broadway, Room 118, Chicago.

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

TYPEWRITERS

RE-MANUFACTURED TYPEWRITERS at reduced prices. Shipped for 5 days' trial. Write for our Catalog No. 20 and save money. Beran Typewriter Co., 58 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

TYPEWRITERS, SLIGHTLY USED. All well-known Standard Makes, with modern improvements. Guaranteed for 1 year. Remington, Underwood, L. C. Smith, etc. \$10 up. Wholesale and retail. Immediate shipment. Write for catalog at once. International Typewriter Exchange, 177-A, N. State St., Chicago.

The MUNSEY

NO other standard magazine approaches the Munsey record in putting across successful advertising campaigns single handed. The Munsey has established successful businesses, built factories, made fortunes for advertisers—single handed. The Munsey pays advertisers so richly because Munsey readers have money to spend, ambition to want and initiative to go and get what they want. They go and get The Munsey at the newsstand every month. They go and get any advertised article they want. Have you such an article? Tell the Munsey readers about it and get what you want—results.

**The Frank A. Munsey
Company**
280 Broadway, New York

The Case of John Carsten

As Told by the President of a Large Western Plant

"John Carsten has been with us for nearly 12 years, and by his cheerful manner and readiness to lend a hand, has earned for himself the liking and respect of every one of us.

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"I sent for Carsten. He told me that the offer he had to turn down two years ago had opened his eyes to what he was missing. Having discovered that Hale was a self-trained man, he decided to follow his example and wrote for advice to the institution that had made Hale a success. He followed the plan that was outlined to him, with the result that in less than two years he had made himself thoroughly conversant with the duties required of an able superintendent, and was now ready to step into a real job with big money. As a matter of fact, he was even then on the verge of accepting a profitable offer from a firm in St. Louis, whose letter he showed me.

"To make a long story short, we got him to give up his notion of going to St. Louis and gave him Hale's old job. That was a couple of years ago. Today he is an undoubted success. I'm telling you of this case in the hope that it may help some other chap to open his eyes to a better and more remunerative future."

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The Greatest Gamble by Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "Which of These Two?" etc.

CHAPTER I.

SWINDLERS DE LUXE.

THE scene was a large room overlooking a garden at the back of a house in Aubrey Street, Mayfair; the time, on a Saturday evening in September, shortly after nine o'clock.

When the curtain rose, so to speak, four actors were on the stage engrossed in argument.

Mrs. Carlisle, known familiarly as Rita in her small and notorious circle of intimates, lolled gracefully on a divan, smoking a cigarette. Mrs. Carlisle was not very young nor yet beautiful, but she knew how to dress. She had dark hair, and eyes like pieces of polished granite set too closely together, and a skin that for whiteness rivaled the lily. Her expression was hard when it was not scornful, and she could see a joke only when it was more than ordinarily cruel.

Plainly speaking, Rita Carlisle was a woman whose present hinted loudly as to what her past had been, and whose future—unless she mended her ways—might easily be Aylesbury Prison.

She was the head, the Supreme Queen of as choice a band of swindlers as ever set up shop in London, and this luxurious Mayfair mansion represented the spider's web.

The girl in white, the golden-haired girl, with a rose pinned in the cluster of curls which suggested her age as anything from fifteen to nineteen; the girl whose blue eyes had already seen more of cruelty and folly and law-breaking than ever comes the way of any decent male citizen of fifty, was Letty Marsh, Mrs. Carlisle's "companion" or "ward," as the case might be, and the daughter of Geoffrey Marsh, one of the two men present.

Letty's eyes had somehow managed to keep their innocence, but one felt that soon it might be difficult for them to do so. Already there was something false in her laughter, and a certain nervous tension about the corners of her mouth.

She was neither fifteen nor nineteen. Two weeks since she had passed her twenty-second birthday, and for five years she had been the tool of Rita Carlisle; a charming, child-faced decoy who led young men to their doom in the various gilded

gaming salons which the gang set up from time to time and from place to place.

Such was Letty, when our curtain goes up, the daughter of a gambler—of heavy-faced, dissipated Geoffrey Marsh—who had not hesitated to throw her into this vicious crucible, and determined that, to the very bitter end, she should make money for him.

The fourth member of the party was Roger Fitzgerald, rich, forty; indifferent alike to vice or virtue; a looker-on at every game of life; a man whose one weakness was a secret passion for Letty Marsh, and whose greatest strength lay in the fact that always, in any circumstances, he could mask his feelings. It was expected that Letty would marry him one day, and she, herself, had said neither yes nor no; things had just drifted on.

A man like Fitzgerald was useful to the gang. He was not out to make money, nor to lose any that he already possessed, but in a cynical way he helped Geoffrey Marsh, and although she did not know it, the very clothes on Letty's young back had been paid for by him.

Fitzgerald, however, was by no means a disagreeable man, either personally or fundamentally. He was good to look at, being tall and bronzed, with a short, neatly trimmed beard, pleasant, dark eyes, and dark hair only just beginning to grow a little thin. His story had been told many years ago, and even, while he loved Letty, he sometimes doubted whether it would be wise to make a sequel.

These four, then, were gathered in Mrs. Carlisle's back drawing-room on this September night, apparently engaged in the innocent pastime of after-dinner conversation, helped on by smokes and coffee. So innocent it was, that the curtains had not been drawn, and it was pleasant to view the moon-ridden garden from the balcony which ran across the long windows. The lights were delightfully shaded; the room itself the epitome of a somewhat sumptuous taste; the four actors appearing to be a gathering of ordinary people in the moneyed walks of life, idly discussing the possibilities of the coming social season.

But they were not ordinary people, and

the possibilities which they discussed were distinctly anti-social. To be precise, at the moment it was but one possibility—a young man whose name was Derrick Tavenor, a captain in a crack regiment which, it was rumored, might shortly be ordered off to India.

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBLE MOTIVE.

LETTY sat silent through a great part of the discussion. It was she who had first met Captain Tavenor two nights ago at a semi-public ball at the Ritz. To-day she and Mrs. Carlisle had lunched with him at the Berkeley; to-night he had been bidden to the mansion in Aubrey Street for a rubber of bridge, with supper to follow.

Mrs. Carlisle had excused herself from asking him to dinner on the plea that she and her young friend—as she termed Letty in this instance—were dining out. In reality, it was her first chance of seeing Marsh for several days, and she wanted to set certain facts before him in relation to the young officer.

"He's head over heels in love with Letty, already," she said in her crisp, hard voice that had some of the qualities of a company sergeant-major's. "It 'll be the easiest job we ever pulled off, Geoff."

"Tavenor," Geoffrey Marsh said thoughtfully, chewing a stubby thumb-nail. "Don't seem to have him on my books at all. Must have oodles of cash, or you wouldn't—"

"He hasn't," Letty put in, a little breathlessly. "He told me he hasn't a penny besides his pay and an allowance of five hundred a year."

Roger Fitzgerald smiled into his neatly trimmed beard.

"You seem to have got on pretty fast with the young man," he observed dryly.

Mrs. Carlisle's glance flew to the clock. Any moment, now, Captain Derrick Tavenor might be announced.

"I don't suppose any of you take me for a complete fool," she said.

"Rather not!" Geoffrey Marsh replied.

"Very well—listen." She whipped a little suède note-book from the gold mesh bag that lay beside her, and riffling through the leaves, found the memoranda she wanted. Glancing at it briefly to refresh her memory, she went on: "Did none of you ever hear of Tavenors Ltd., iron, steel, and Heaven knows what besides, of Beltingham-on-the-Aure?"

"Good Lord, Rita, you must be mad. That fellow's a chair-ridden old man. Got creeping paralysis or heart-disease, or something, and he hasn't any sons—only two daughters," Marsh protested. "I've been through that Beltingham lot with a fine-tooth comb. Besides, they're all tight-wads, non-conformists, pussy-footers. Sir William 'd faint at the sight of a card. I know all about him. He booted me out of Beltingham ten years ago."

"Please listen to me," Mrs. Carlisle cut in angrily. "Sometimes, Geoff, I'm inclined to think you're getting beyond your work. You drink too much, for one thing. Captain Derrick happens to be old Sir William's nephew, heir, and the apple of his eye all rolled into one. He's as proud as punch of the youngster, and there's talk that Derrick will probably marry his cousin, Julia."

"The family is everything to Sir William. Any stain on it would probably kill him, and I know him sufficiently well to be certain that, miser as he is, he'll pay through the nose rather than face the smallest breath of scandal. Good! He's so good it 'd make you ill. And I've looked him up afresh in Bradstreet's."

"Tavenors Ltd. is rated, common stock, at five million sterling. Most of it will go to this Derrick, but I wouldn't be surprised if there was some provision in the old beast's will against gambling—particularly against roulette. However, that needn't concern us. If we can clear up three or four thousand, it 'll be a good enough night's work, and help with our initial expenses at Monte. Eh, Geoff?"

Toward the end of her speech, Mrs. Carlisle had become rather passionate for her. The marble whiteness of her face was tinged with color, and her eyes glittered strangely.

Pausing in the act of lighting a cigar, Roger Fitzgerald threw her a curious glance.

"You appear to know a lot about this William Tavenor," he said. "It sounds to me like intimate knowledge."

Rita Carlisle laughed quietly.

"It is," she replied. "I don't know why I shouldn't tell you, since we are all friends together. I happen to be Sir William Tavenor's wife—his second wife. Perhaps you can guess what separated us? The green tables, for one thing. I hate him—I hate him as I hate no other living creature on this earth."

"Whew!" Fitzgerald ejaculated. "You take my breath away, Rita. So there's a double motive in rooking young Derrick?"

"Precisely," Mrs. Carlisle agreed, with her thin-lipped smile.

She turned, her hand raised in caution, as an odious, bald-headed man-servant appeared, and announced suavely:

"Captain Tavenor, madam."

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSED CUE.

THE decoy, in her white dress, and the rose nestling amongst the curls that were bunched "flapper-wise," threw a strained, rather agonized glance toward the finely built young soldier who followed the servant's announcement.

He was more than good to look upon, was Derrick Tavenor. It was not personal beauty which recommended him, for he possessed none of the facial qualities of a Greek god. He was just a fine, square-jawed youngster, with rather blunt features, and a look of honesty about him that went straight to the heart of all decent people. His eyes were gray and very keen, shaded by black lashes. His hair was sleek and dark; his whole personality radiated the good health of a clean soul in a clean body.

A sick feeling encompassed Letty Marsh, a thorough detestation of herself and the loathsome part she had to play in what might so easily be a tragedy for Derrick Tavenor. It was a part she had played

before, but she had never quite realized the hideous cruelty and wickedness of such a thing. She had been thrown into it when scarcely more than a child; had accepted the life passively because no other had been offered her, and this sense of revolt was so new and unexpected that it took her unawares. She felt the meanest traitor on earth when Captain Tavenor lingeringly bent over her hand with an expression of blind adoration on his strong countenance.

Yes, he was in love with her; she had at least known that almost from the first hour they met. He thought her just a charming, very young girl of his own world, for the gang had clever methods, and some of their affiliations—like Roger Fitzgerald, for instance—were anything but open to question.

In this Aubrey Street venture, Rita Carlisle had launched out on new lines and in a comparatively new environment.

After the exchange of commonplace pleasantries, a table of bridge was made up, Letty and Derrick Tavenor finding themselves partners, and Marsh sitting out. They played for low stakes, of course, for it would have been futile to frighten Captain Tavenor off at the very start. They could afford to let him win, and did, most generously.

Indeed, when it came midnight and he had some ten pounds of their money, Derrick felt rather uncomfortable. He was not a wonderfully good player, but the cards he had held that evening were amazing. He did not notice that they were particularly so when Mrs. Carlisle dealt.

There were three quick rubbers, and then Marsh, who had been fooling about in an adjoining room by himself, appeared at the door with a whisky and soda balanced perilously in one hand, and announced jubilantly that he had just won something over a thousand pounds worth of bone counters playing a little system of his own at roulette.

Mrs. Carlisle appeared to be very much annoyed.

"Really, Geoff, you needn't think we're to be caught so simply. The last time I took the bank against one of your 'sys-

tems,' I went down a couple of hundred. No, thank you."

She turned to Captain Derrick with her choicest Mona Lisa smile. "I think I ought to explain Letty's father. He's quite harmless, really, but he has a passion for gaming. We have one of those toy roulette tables—you know. And Mr. Marsh simply lives with it. Fortunately, so far, he has restricted his passion to the bone counters—but to hear him talk, you wouldn't imagine that there was such a thing possible as to lose."

This, as everybody knew, was Letty's cue. She should have said: "Well, let's give him a game. There'd be no harm in playing for pennies. I've won such a lot at bridge that I can afford to take the bank."

But Letty didn't say it.

An awkward moment passed while they waited for her. Captain Tavenor did not seem to realize that he might be in danger. He smiled easily from one to the other. They were all pleasant people, in his opinion, and he was in love with Letty. He felt rather rich, himself, for in addition to the ten pounds odd he had won at bridge, he had in his pocket a check for his quarterly allowance. Not that he would have gambled it away; only, it made him feel rich.

Mrs. Carlisle broke the silence.

"I think I promised you all supper," she said, in a voice of forced gaiety.

She rang a bell, and soon they were flocking down to the dining-room. Somehow Letty and Captain Tavenor contrived to be last. They even lingered for a brief moment at the turn of the stairs. The girl's fingers touched his sleeve, and he turned to her, sensitively eager and inquiring.

"Captain Tavenor, I want you to do me a favor!" she cried breathlessly.

"But—of course! I mean to say, anything in this world—"

"No—no! It's not quite so big as that. But after supper, will you go? As soon as you decently can. I want to get father home. I don't want him to start this roulette business. He—he's mad about it, and it worries me. The others don't understand. They think it's only a game, and it

means nothing to them. But sometimes he's rather foolish, and—"

She was lying desperately—not to save that miserable reprobate, Geoffrey Marsh, but to save the man who loved her and—the man whom she loved.

Their eyes met, and Derrick Tavenor bent over her with a sense of awe and reverence.

"Poor little girl! I'll clear off at once, if you think that 'll break up the party. But when am I to see you again?"

"I—I don't know."

"To-morrow? It must be to-morrow."

"Sunday?"

"Couldn't I come in for tea? Could I see you alone?"

She hesitated but briefly. So used was she to intrigue, poor child, that the pros and cons of a delicate situation passed before her in mental review like a flash of lightning.

"It might not be convenient—here. I'll meet you in Hyde Park by the Achilles Statue at four o'clock. Will that do?"

Tavenor laughed, with the low, exultant chuckle of youth sensing the best of all adventures—a love-tryst.

"I'll be there, walking circles around old Achilles long before you turn up."

CHAPTER IV.

JULIA.

IN the valley of the Aure lay Beltingham, the little industrial city whose romance was built of such stern stuff as steel and iron foundries, coal-fields, and mighty ship-yards.

It was difficult for living things, such as grass and flowers, to grow in Beltingham; many of the children found it impossible.

Yet, of its kind, the little city was something of a model. Left to themselves, the majority of the workmen would have been fairly content. Their master, Sir William Tavenor—they proudly called him the "Iron Man"—was firm, sometimes hard, but always just. He lived more grandly than they in the purer and more comfortable altitude of the hills, but he lived without display or ostentation. It is true that

he had a motor-car to take him to and from his office at the works; but before his first "stroke"—which occurred some years ago—he had always walked.

It was something less than a fortnight after Derrick Tavenor's introduction to the house in Aubrey Street that he arrived by the afternoon train at Beltingham, to find himself suddenly lonely, as a stranger among strangers. However, it was only for the week-end, and he managed a cheery greeting to his cousin Julia, who was there with her rather ramshackle two-seated car to drive him home.

He would have kissed her, but lately Julia had been shy of these cousinly caresses, and so he only took her hand. Even then she flushed and half drew away, her fingers limp and lifeless.

In a way, Julia resembled her own handshake. She was a pale, ethereal girl, thin as a willow wand, painfully retiring at times, but possessing a very practical mind. Her sister Maud, a thick, stoutish girl with no imagination, but immense energy, ran the house; but Julia kept the accounts, helped their father with his personal affairs, and organized every public enterprise in Beltingham. The saying was, that she wore herself out.

There were other sayings about her, too, the most persistent of which was that she was in love with her Cousin Derrick.

During the drive back, up the wide, well-kept roads that led toward Tavenor Court, Julia regaled Derrick with bits of family news and local gossip; but he only gave her half his attention. His thoughts and his heart were elsewhere, and finally he had to speak of them.

"Julia," he said. "I'm going to get married."

The abruptness of the announcement caused Julia's frail hands to slip on the steering gear for an instant, and the car gave a nasty swerve.

"Look out, old girl! Did I startle you?"

"A little," she admitted, with a shrill laugh. "Who's the unfortunate lady? Anybody we know?"

"I don't think so. Her name is Letty Marsh. I met her at a dance in London."

Julia was making a very brave effort to

maintain her composure. To look at her, no one would have dreamed that her heart had become a seething thing of despair, misery, and above all, hatred for an unknown girl named Letty Marsh.

"Marsh?" she said reflectively. "Who are her people, Derrick?"

For some reason, Derrick was slightly annoyed. Why should Julia cross-question him like this?

"Her father's a retired colonel. She has no mother, and lives with a Mrs. Carlisle. She hasn't any money, if that's what you're driving at, but Uncle Bill has been nagging at me to marry, as you know, get out of the army, and help him at the works. I've come home to tell him that I'm willing."

"Oh, Derrick, don't be cross with me," Julia pleaded, her eyes filling with tears. "There's plenty for all at Tavenor Court, and I'm sure she—she must be very nice."

"She is," Derrick agreed. "She's simply wonderful. Here—stop the car a moment, Julia; I want to show you Letty's photograph."

CHAPTER V.

THE "IRON MAN."

HALF an hour later, in the library, Derrick was showing the same photograph to his uncle.

Sir William in appearance certainly did not suggest the psalm-singing miser of Rita Carlisle's description. He was a stout, ruddy-faced old man with a thick crop of iron-gray hair and a jaunty mustache. His eyes could be steely, but more often they expressed mirth and good humor, and his laughter was like the gentle roar of a bull.

Most of his life was spent in a wheelchair, but it was so constructed that he could get about all over the place by himself, even into the garden, by means of a wooden runway from one of the side doors.

Altogether, Sir William Tavenor was a jolly old man, patient under his increasing infirmity, and never angry unless some one broke one of the strict rules of conduct which he had laid down for the benefit of his family and his workmen.

Derrick had no fear of Uncle Bill. They were proud of each other, these two, and perfect confidence existed between them.

"I didn't write, sir, because I thought I'd rather tell you myself. Letters are rather a nuisance."

"Frequently," Sir William replied, his round eyes fixed intently upon the photograph of Letty Marsh. "Looks like a cinema star, Rickey. All those curls, and that rosebud mouth. Is she out of the school-room yet?"

As with Julia, Derrick felt slightly annoyed; also disappointed, for he had expected Letty to be admired instantly.

"She's twenty-two," he said.

And then Sir William wanted to know about Letty's family.

"Retired colonel, eh? 'Geoffrey Marsh,' did you say? What regiment?"

Unfortunately Derrick did not know, but Sir William, undaunted, asked for the army list, and searched fruitlessly for Colonel Geoffrey Marsh, retired.

"As a matter of fact," Derrick said, with an apologetic cough, "the father's a bit of a rotter, I suspect. Letty lives with a Mrs. Carlisle—a very nice woman, indeed, although they're all a rather go-ahead crowd. Letty hates it."

"What do you mean by 'go-ahead'?" Sir William asked, with sudden suspicion.

Derrick shifted uneasily.

"Oh, well, you know what London life is—bridge, late hours, and all the rest of it. Letty's quite different. And—Uncle Bill—we're rather fond of each other, you know."

Sir William shook his head dubiously, and the merry twinkle died out of his eyes.

"I'm rather sorry, Rickey. I had a sneaking hope that you and Julia might hit it off one of these days—"

"Julia! Good Heavens—why, we're practically brother and sister."

"Yes, Rickey, that's true. You've seen too much of each other. You know, son, I want you to be happy. You know how I feel about gambling, and marriage is the greatest gamble of all. Yet I want you to marry. I don't want to die before I've seen your son, Rickey, and there isn't a chance of my lasting more than a couple of years

longer. I might pop off any moment, you know."

"Yes, I know," Derrick said soberly.

There had never been any secret or pretense about the Iron Man's health; he would have none of it himself, and discouraged it in others.

"You're sure you care for her?"

"I—well, sir, I scarcely know how to say. I do care. I don't think it would be possible for me to tell you—"

"There, now—I've been in love myself. You needn't try to tell me. Here's my hand, Rickey—and God knows I hope you aren't making a mistake. I hope this go-ahead crowd you speak of are really distasteful to Miss Marsh. This gambling fever that seems to have attacked everybody—well, you know, I don't mind a friendly game of bridge—but upon my soul I sometimes wonder if one thing doesn't lead to another. There'll be none of that 'go-ahead' crowd here, mind you, and no gambling whatever. You haven't forgotten Gerald Stansbury, I hope."

"No, I haven't," Dick said quietly. "He was my best friend, and if ever I find the girl who ruined him, it'll go hard with her."

There was a depressed silence for a moment. Both of the Tavenors were thinking of that gay-hearted young classmate of Derrick's who had started off so merrily for a trip around the world and met with disaster on the very transatlantic liner by which he set sail from Liverpool. There had been a gang of gamblers on board, and they had for their decoy a young and seemingly innocent girl.

Gerald Stansbury never even reached New York. The night before the Gigantic was scheduled to dock, he threw himself overboard rather than face inevitable disgrace and disaster. That was four years ago, but the memory of it was green in Derrick's memory. Poor old Gerald—his friend and more than brother!

"The damn pity of it was that if only he'd waited and cabled, I'd've seen him through it," Sir William muttered. "Everybody can make a fool of himself once. It's permitted. But, cheer up, Rickey. It's rather unfair to remind you of such things

at this moment. Now let's talk about ways and means. You know how I feel about 'the family.'"

"Yes, sir. It's always been understood that I bring my wife home to Tavenor Court."

"You don't object? You see, Rickey, I believe thoroughly in the patriarchal system. Julia and Maud understand. Your wife will be mistress here—but as long as I live, enough of me to breathe, that is—I'm the master."

"Yes, sir, it's only right. It's the way I've been brought up to think, too."

"Good! But there's no objection to your having your own little nest in town. You'll want to get away from us now and again—and that's only right, too. Get out of the army as soon as you decently can. A family man should stay at home, and besides, the business needs you, Rickey—or soon will. Tell Julia to send for Macdonald. We must draw up a new settlement for you. I believe in keeping bachelors on short commons—particularly young ones—but a married man needs a little more money. We'll make it three thousand a year to begin with, eh?"

"Indeed, you're generous!"

And Derrick meant exactly what he said. The vast fortune of Tavenors Ltd. had never obtruded itself into the simple needs and life of the Tavenor family. To Derrick three thousand pounds a year seemed more money than Letty and he could ever hope to spend, however extravagant they were.

CHAPTER VI.

STOLE AWAY.

LETTY MARSH was in deep disgrace. In the harshly expressed opinion of her father, she had "let down the gang badly."

Every opportunity had offered for the successful plucking of Captain Tavenor, and each time Letty had frustrated it.

Roger Fitzgerald, that bearded man of wisdom and mystery, who, properly speaking, was not a member of the gang at all, for once found himself in entire sympathy

with Letty's father. Perhaps that was because he realized that not only had Captain Tavenor fallen in love with Letty, but that she was in love with him. But he did not mention his discovery.

Rita Carlisle, baffled and furious, argued with Letty to no purpose. The girl simply would not obey orders. She went even further; she made it impossible at every touch and turn for Derrick Tavenor to be fleeced. She might easily have swayed him, they knew; she had done it before with men who were not in love with her. But where Derrick was concerned she was adamant.

Mrs. Carlisle finally had the happy inspiration that Letty needed a holiday. Perhaps they had worked her too hard of late. Certainly the girl's appearance warranted such a conclusion.

Yes, she must have a holiday. Rest and a little kindness might achieve what anger had failed to do.

So Letty's trunks were packed, some money was given her, she was put into a taxicab, and carelessly instructed to take herself off to Brighton for a month. No one thought it worth while even to go with her to the station. A girl like Letty Marsh could be trusted to take care of herself, and she was only worth coddling when she was useful.

It scarcely seemed possible, thought Letty, that she had really got away from them, and, although they did not know it, she intended to remain away forever. Never more should that vicious circle encompass her. Once she was married to Derrick, they would not dare for their own sakes to molest her. She knew too much about them and their friends and accomplices.

The cab whirled her to Paddington instead of to Victoria, and she put her trunks and other luggage into the cloak-room. Then she hid herself in a corner of the first-class waiting-room with her veil drawn down, until Derrick should come to fetch her.

She had told Derrick what was, indeed, the truth, that her father had set his heart upon her marrying Roger Fitzgerald, and that the only way to circumvent this without any fuss, was to elope.

Derrick was only too willing. He had

his uncle's consent, and on his side nothing further was necessary, although he feared Uncle Bill might feel a little hurt not to be notified or even invited to the impromptu wedding. But Derrick wrote to him, explaining in full, and saying that after a week's honeymoon at Blackpool he would bring his little bride home to Tavenor Court. Blackpool was also an arrangement of Letty's. She could think of no other place where the gang would be less likely to look for her.

Half child, half cunning woman of the world, she cowered in a corner of the big waiting-room, picturing to herself what it would mean to her if Derrick did not come. Did he really love her as much as he said? Was she really the whole of his world, as he was hers?

Ah, there he was at last!

She rose unsteadily as he stood in the doorway searching for her with his eyes, his good, pleasant face radiating tender and eager concern.

"Here I am, Derrick."

"Oh, darling—just for the moment I had a dreadful fear that you hadn't come!"

"And I," she laughed happily, "that you weren't coming."

They linked arms, and hurried out of the station to find a cab to take them to the registry office.

CHAPTER VII.

A FACE FROM THE PAST.

IT was all over, even the honeymoon. Derrick and Letty Tavenor had arrived at Tavenor Court with their luggage—Julia and Maud had never seen so many clothes as Letty possessed—and Uncle Bill, home from the works early in honor of the occasion, had inspected the bride at tea.

When she looked at Uncle Bill, apparently so helpless, yet really a formidably active old man in his smooth-running wheel-chair, Letty was vaguely afraid. His eyes daunted her. But ethereal Julia was effusively kind. Her thin cheeks flamed with hectic color as she took Letty to the wing of the old mansion which had been hastily prepared for the young couple.

It was not until the dressing-gong sounded for dinner that Derrick and Letty found themselves alone.

There still hung over Letty's head the hateful task of informing her father and Mrs. Carlisle of what she had done. She had been gone on her "holiday" a week now, and by this time it would have occurred to them that they had not heard from her. But just for this one more night she determined to postpone writing the letter.

But suddenly Letty's chatter ceased, and she stopped abruptly, her hand pressed to her heart as if in pain.

They were in Derrick's study, and he, in his shirt-sleeves, was setting out a row of old but beloved pipes on the mantel-shelf.

Letty stood before a desk on which was the framed photograph of a young man, a youth with tender eyes and the clean-lipped smile of hope. Also, he would be proud, that boy; too proud, if at the same time too weak, to face disgrace.

The girl grew cold with apprehension. The memory of that boy's face was burned on her brain; for four years she had tried vainly to forget that Gerald Stansbury, ruined by gambling, had thrown himself overboard; ruined, as Letty knew, by herself, and the cheating gang who used her for their tool.

Derrick turned and saw her staring at the photograph. Instantly his happy face was shadowed, and he came and stood beside her, one arm across her shoulders.

"That chap was my best friend, Letty," he said quietly, but with a note of passion. "I wish you could have known him. He had a great future before him in the Diplomatic Service."

"Oh, is he?" Letty gasped out a broken question as her husband halted abruptly.

"Yes, he's dead," Derrick replied. "Some day I'll tell you about it."

"Tell me now, Derrick," she whispered.

"He—he has a nice face."

"I don't want you to be saddened to-night, darling, and whenever I think about Gerald I get a regular hump. We'll put his old phiz to bed in a drawer."

"Do tell me, please," Letty pleaded.

She thought she was going to scream,

cry out, or make a dreadful scene, but in reality she managed to remain quite calm. But she must know how much of the story Derrick knew. She would go raving mad unless he told her.

"In a way it was a common enough story," Derrick said, with a heavy sigh. "He met a girl—a sweet, 'innocent thing,' they said she was—on an ocean liner, and she introduced him to her 'family' party, who it happened were a bunch of notorious gamblers. They fleeced him, and he—eh—took his own life. He threw himself overboard."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Letty cried.

Indeed, it seemed even more dreadful to her now than at the time it had happened. It was sheer agony.

"But perhaps the girl didn't know what she was doing, Derrick. Perhaps she didn't understand—"

"Oh, *didn't* she?" For the first time Letty saw a contemptuous sneer on her husband's face, and although he did not know it, that sneer was for her. She was the girl who had ruined and sent Gerald Stansbury to his death.

"One of these days I'm going to find that woman—girl, or whatever she was—and when I do, may God have mercy on her soul. And Letty, I believe I'm going to find her. It was the purest luck the other day I happened to mention the incident to your friend Fitzgerald, and he told me he was on the Gigantic when it occurred. He says he remembers the girl perfectly. Her name was Maitland, and he thinks she's in England again; that he's positive he saw her recently in London."

It was a miracle that Letty did not faint. She saw it all, now, realized why Roger had been so coolly indifferent to her love for Derrick—a love which she could not disguise from that astute man of the world. Fitzgerald could have stopped her marriage with a word.

And even now he could utterly destroy her happiness.

"By Jove, there goes the dinner gong, and we aren't dressed! Do make haste, Letty. I'll send word that we'll be down in five minutes. Uncle Bill is a bear for punctuality."

Letty stumbled into her bedroom and caught up the first thing that came to hand. It happened to be the simple white dress she had worn that night in Aubrey Street. She bunched up her curls and thrust a rose into them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIDOWED MAID.

ONE man servant, assisted by a house-parlor maid, waited at table that night. The joint was placed before Sir William, who carved for them all. The food was abundant, but plain, and no wine was served until dessert, when a decanter of port went around, refused by Julia and Maud, although Letty, who was offered it first, unthinkingly poured herself a glass. She did not touch it, however, for Julia's pale eyes seemed to regard her with slight disapprobation.

Sir William chose a cigar from a choice-looking box that the butler proffered him, and Julia, hitherto mistress of Tavenor Court, glanced anxiously at Letty.

"Hadn't we better leave them?" she suggested meekly.

"Oh, yes, of course!"

Letty pushed back her chair with undue haste and rose. She was unused to these customs, for the women of the "gang" sat as long at table as the men, smoking and drinking with them.

The three trailed into the drawing-room with its old-fashioned grand piano and faded rose brocades.

Maud had some needlework to occupy her, and Julia brought forth a carefully arranged book of snap-shot photographs to show Letty. She thought Letty would be interested, for Julia had taken the photographs herself, and—without exception—Derrick figured in all of them. The first showed him in football shorts at about the age of fourteen. Then they went on up and gradually Letty became aware of the identity of a companion who appeared often with him. Gerald Stansbury—over and over again.

Sometimes the two had posed for Julia with their arms slung across each other's

shoulders; sometimes they had not known they were being snapped, as for instance, when a friendly scuffle or race with the dogs was in progress.

"Derrick's best friend," Julia said in a sad whisper. "He's dead, poor boy."

Letty had to swallow before she could manage to reply.

"Yes, Derrick told me."

"I expect he would. They were so devoted to each other." Julia glanced quickly at her sober-faced sister, engrossed with her embroidery. "Maud and Gerald were to have been married when he returned from his trip around the world. She'll never get over it," she whispered.

Maud did not hear what was being said, but at that moment she looked up, and smiling sweetly, asked Letty if she would sing and play for them. She was a dark girl, rather inclined to be stout, and not at all pretty, but she had the kindest face in the world. Not only had Letty, masquerading as "Lucy Maitland," been the means of robbing Derrick of his friend, but she had also robbed Maud Tavenor of her sweetheart.

She went to the piano without protest, through sheer nervousness. At that moment she could not have sung to save her soul, but at least she could play, and it was a relief not to have to make conversation.

She ran through two numbers of the Peer Gynt suite, playing as she knew, very badly, but Maud appeared to be charmed.

"Now that Letty's here, we really ought to keep up our practising," she said to her sister.

"I'm afraid I haven't any time," said Julia.

Then, while Letty sat listless on the piano stool, Julia enumerated her duties for the next day, for an example. In the morning she would be occupied at the hospital, and after lunch there were two committee meetings, and she really must look in and find out how Grace Howland was behaving herself.

An argument, was picked up here, by Maud.

"It only makes Grace worse when you keep after her, Julia. She told me so, herself. She says it's nobody's business how

she spends her own money, and if she likes to have a good time—"

"Maud!" Julia was indignant. "You know very well that Grace is a fire-brand. She flirts outrageously, even with the married men, and father is getting quite out of patience with the women coming and worrying him all the time. Grace must learn to behave herself, or she'll have to leave the works."

"That doesn't mean she'll leave Beltingham," Maud replied, setting her stitches carefully. "We can't afford to let her loose on the town. And if you ask me, it's as much the men's fault as it is hers. They simply won't leave her alone."

Julia sighed deeply.

"Well, something must be done. I wish to goodness she'd marry young Craig and settle down."

"Perhaps she will," Maud said hopefully.

"Perhaps pigs will fly," sniffed Julia sarcastically.

"I heard of one that did," giggled her sister. "Somebody took it up in an airplane for a mascot. Letty, won't you sing, please? Dick says you have a lovely voice."

"I'm just a little tired to-night," Letty replied. "If you don't mind—not to-night. There's a letter I ought to write. Would you excuse me? I think I'll go over to my room at once."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LETTER.

AS Letty passed the library door on her way to her and Derrick's wing of the house, she paused just for an instant. Derrick and his uncle were engrossed in cheerful conversation and Uncle Bill's hearty laughter rang out at a comic story he had been narrating.

Letty hurried on. She had thought to be so happy, here; and now in the twinkling of an eye, all was changed. Never had she been so miserable in her life, and that was saying a great deal.

If Derrick discovered who she was, what would he do?

She recalled his words with a shudder: "One of these days I'm going to find that woman—girl, or whatever she was—and when I do, may God have mercy on her soul."

Used as Letty was to keeping a careful guard over her features and speech, she felt that she must betray herself every time Gerald Stansbury was mentioned. It seemed as though it would take no time at all for Julia Tavenor to probe the depths of her guilty and stricken soul.

Of course there was one way out of it. She could go back to the gang and write a confession to Derrick. But that was just the one way she could not take. Derrick was dearer to her than her own life. Without him she knew that she would not care to live.

Yet how could she go on living with him while this shadow, so menacing and sinister, hung over her? Any moment he might learn. She might betray herself in her sleep or even by the guilt in her eyes; and of course there was Roger Fitzgerald, hovering like Mephistopheles in the background, waiting his chance to pounce down and destroy her.

Had Roger even the remnants of a heart? If so, he could not resist the appeal she meant to make to him. But it must be done quickly.

She hurried into the chintz-hung room which Julia had indicated was for her private use as a sitting-room. The freshness of the blotting-pad bade Letty's cautious mind go warily. Once a member of the gang had been caught by the impression of a check on the hotel blotter. Rita Carlisle had stigmatized it as the gross carelessness of an amateur.

Letty dried her two letters, and the envelopes, as well, by blowing upon them. She also was ready on the instant to thrust them between the sheets of the pad and be engaged upon another that anybody might peruse, if Derrick returned prematurely. She wrote fast and furiously, her divided attention in no wise interfering with the subject matter.

Having notified her father briefly that she had married Captain Tavenor and hoped he would allow her to be happy in

peace, she passed on to the more difficult letter to Roger Fitzgerald.

DEAR ROGER:

I have only just learned that that poor Stansbury boy was Derrick's best friend. I didn't know it before I married him. Derrick says you told him you had seen "Lucy Maitland" in London. Oh, Roger, be kind to me! You know what a rotten life I've had, and I couldn't help it, either. I never had a chance like other girls.

Roger, I love my husband. I didn't care for you in that way. I didn't know the meaning of love until I met Derrick. Roger, I'm only twenty-two and God knows what would have happened to me if I'd gone on with that awful life. I hated it, Roger. You were always kind to me, though, and I pray that you'll go on being kind, and help me to keep this dreadful secret from Derrick. It would only break his heart as well as mine, if he knew.

The girl that did that dreadful thing to Gerald Stansbury wasn't the girl that I am now. And I never knew what I was doing, really. It was pretty nearly the end of me when he killed himself. Don't you remember how ill I was, and how angry Rita was with me for letting it prey on my mind?

I never could forget that boy's face, and perhaps you can guess what it was like for me to find his photograph here on Derrick's writing-table, and to learn what great friends they had been.

There are crowds of his photographs. Julia Tavenor had a book full of them, and she showed it to me this evening. Then they asked me to sing and play! Oh, Roger, be merciful to me! I only wanted to be happy, which doesn't seem possible now. But it would be worse if I lost Derrick. He believes in me—

CHAPTER X.

"MRS. DERRICK TAVENOR."

SEVERAL days passed; days that for Letty were filled with anxiety and dread.

Her greatest worry had to do with the formalities attending the arrival of the morning post-bag, which was opened at the breakfast table.

Things had gone on in a state of suspense until on the fourth morning the thing Letty had been dreading happened.

Uncle Bill opened the bag as usual, heaped out the contents, and pushed his eye-glasses into a position of security.

Then began the discourse, while Letty's cold hands fluttered over the tea-cups. There was a very heavy post that morning, and it seemed as though he would never get through sorting it and making his rambling jokes about Maud's bills and Julia's circulars.

Finally there was but one letter left, and the unhappy bride permitted herself to sigh prematurely.

Alas! Being the first and only letter she had received, Sir William made the most of it.

"Mrs. Derrick Tavenor"! Now, who the dickens can that be? Will somebody tell me? Bold and masculine handwriting, I should describe it. I'm afraid 'Mrs. Derrick Tavenor' is a flirt—whatever she may be. Bless my soul, of course it's our little Letty! Here, Maud, you pass it around to her. Mustn't let Rickey see. My word, he mustn't get an inkling that she's carrying—he mustn't get an inkling that she's carrying on with such a bold gentleman."

There was no mistaking Roger's handwriting, even from a distance, and the heavy, square white envelope, with its dark green seal.

Derrick looked up with interest.

"Who's it from, Letty?" he asked. And then, he, too, recognized the writing. "Oh, from Fitzgerald."

Letty read the jealous question in his eyes, and knew that it must be answered. He was asking sharply, if silently, why Roger was writing to her.

"Well, why don't you open it?" he said impatiently, as she laid it beside her plate and swallowed a gulp of tea.

CHAPTER XI.

DERRICK READS.

A HUSH fell over the breakfast table. It seemed as though they were all waiting for Letty to open her letter, whether it concerned them or not—and after all, whom could it concern except Letty, herself?

She resented Derrick's question, and the sharp look in his eyes. He would most certainly wish to know what Roger Fitzgerald

had written. He was waiting for her to open it. They were all waiting. Above all, Derrick waited, so truculent that everybody could see Sir William's jest about jealousy was anything but a joke.

Of course it was very wrong of Derrick. Everybody knows that young married couples should hold each other's correspondence inviolate, but such sound theories often crumble to dust in practice. This letter was from a man who had hoped to marry Letty, and proof was plain that she did not care to read what he had to say to her in the presence of others.

Naturally quick-witted, Letty found herself in a trap from which there was no escape. It was a novel experience for her.

"Perhaps you would like to open it, yourself, Derrick, and read it first," she hazarded sharply. "*If that is a custom of this house.*"

Derrick flushed, and Uncle Bill frowned, while the girls gasped in unison. Such pertness was unheard of, and was nothing less than a direct slap at Sir William.

"*Politeness is a custom of this house,*" said Uncle Bill. "We're rather proud of ourselves in that respect."

On the verge of tears which would flow in another second, Letty jumped to her feet, snatched the offending letter, and with a cry of apology fled from the room in the midst of what seemed a crashing silence.

Her breast heaved, and great, resentful sobs shook her as she tore along the passage to her own side of the house. Here she discovered a housemaid pottering about, and dismissed the unfortunate girl with a flow of angry words and a stamp of the foot learned from Rita Carlisle.

It was true that Letty had made laudable efforts to rid herself of the "gang," but it was not so easy to shed the habits of a lifetime, however short that lifetime had been.

Would Derrick follow her?

She was prepared to give him battle if he did. It was a pity he couldn't be told straight out that she was fighting for his own happiness no less than her own.

Their first quarrel! Dear heaven, and a quarrel which involved the whole family!

If only it were just between Derrick and herself she would not have feared so greatly. But they would all be watching, now, for another outbreak of temper.

She tore open the envelope with vicious, angry movements, wondering why Roger used such resistant stationery. Finally the sheet came out, and after one glance down it, Letty subsided hysterically on to a couch. This is what she read:

DEAR LETTY:

Permit an old friend to wish you every possible joy and happiness in your marriage to Captain Tavenor. From what little I have seen of him, he strikes me as being a fine fellow, although not perhaps wholly deserving of Letty Marsh. But what man could be that?

We were surprised, of course, at the suddenness of your decision to take "the great step," but if you are happy, no one could wish for anything better.

Please convey my kindest regards to your husband, and also most hearty congratulations for being the luckiest man in the world.

With repeated hopes that life will give you nothing but the very best, believe me.

Your sincere old friend,

ROGER FITZGERALD.

Not a word of what she had feared; not a single syllable that Derrick or any one else might not read. Yet Letty, herself, could read between the lines that Roger did not mean to harm her; that as far as he was concerned her dark secret would be kept.

At least that was the way it looked to her, and this was certainly a glorious respite; but she knew, too, that the gang's methods were seldom open and above-board, and while Roger might appear to mean what he wrote, the stab could easily come from another direction. But anyway, this was a respite.

She flung the letter aside, and it fell to the floor, while she sat huddled on the couch sobbing her heart out between shame and relief.

It would be a blessing if she could love Derrick a little less. Loving him so much was sheer torture, for now always there hung over her the dark fear of losing him. If he should turn from her with hate and loathing in the eyes—how could she bear it?

The door opened softly, and he came in,

regarding her silently. He had been angry at the moment of entering, but the sight of her weeping was too much for him, and almost immediately he crossed the room, sat down beside her, and gathered her into his arms.

"My poor little darling, what a beast I was! I didn't mean a thing, really, only I love you so much, and it takes nothing to make me jealous."

"I was the beast," she sobbed. "There's the horrid old thing—read it."

She kicked the sheet of note-paper ungratefully with the toe of her dainty slipper.

Derrick picked it up, still keeping an arm about her, and a little shamefacedly glanced through the contents. He was still jealous, sufficiently so to wish to know what Fitzgerald had said.

But now that he had read it, there was no occasion for comment, and he was very sorry he had instigated that scene at the breakfast-table. She wept in his arms, and he thought he had comforted her, but her poor heart was heavy, nevertheless. The kinder he was, the more her conscience reproached her; the tenderer, the more it seemed that she could bear his hatred perhaps better than this love which she did not deserve. If he knew her for what she was, he would not love her. She wasn't really the Letty that he loved. She was an impostor, although she had not known that at first.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR WILLIAM DISSEMBLES.

UNCLE BILL looked up with an expression of bland inquiry as Letty stood humbly before him.

He sat in his wheel-chair before the vast, flat-topped desk in the library, checking household accounts which Julia had laid ready for him.

"Well, Letty?"

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I thought I ought to—to come and apologize," she whimpered, her pretty nose and eyes red with weeping.

"Sit down, my dear. It isn't a question of 'ought to apologize—'"

"I mean—I want to," Letty said, a sense of rebellion gradually superseding her humility.

"That's better. Of course, I accept your apology, my dear, and it's very generous of you to offer it. Down at the works when things go wrong, I always make it my business to find out *why* before I pass judgment. What, in your opinion, is wrong with Tavenor Court?"

"Oh, Uncle Bill, I didn't mean—"

"But you didn't make that remark at breakfast for nothing. Now, I'm going to tell you something very plainly, and you needn't reply; just think it over, and ask yourself whether I'm right or not. There's nothing wrong with Tavenor Court, Letty. We don't demand to know what's in each other's letters. That little affair is quite between you and Rickey, and you can squabble about it to your heart's content. But don't confuse a lover's quarrel with the general conduct of the house. We are simple people, it is true, but we have nothing to fear and nothing to conceal of which we could be ashamed. If you find life here irksome, then the fault is with you, not with Tavenor Court. Now you think that over, and ask yourself the truth about it."

Again that overmastering fear clutched at Letty's heart, mingling to some extent with indignation. Nothing to conceal? What about Julia's adoration of Derrick? But perhaps, after all, that was nothing to be ashamed of, and Julia made small pretence of concealing it.

But Letty's fear was for her own dark secret, and for the moment she could have sworn that this eagle-eyed old man had ferreted it out. At least he knew she had a secret, and that it could not bear the light of day.

"I'm very sorry, Uncle Bill. I was brought up so differently. I mean—sometimes you frighten me," she said awkwardly. "I feel that you disapprove of me."

This was most unjust, for never before had Sir William shown the slightest sign of disapproval. He stared at her in amazement.

"'Pon my soul, Letty, you astonish me! I almost wish you hadn't said that. Come here, my child—"

She moved toward him, and he took one of her hands and patted it.

"Now give me a kiss and clear off. Tell Charles I'll be ready for him to shift me into the car in five minutes. Just tell him as you go out, my dear, and shut the door very carefully behind you."

After she had gone he sighed deeply and took a letter from his pocket which had come for him that morning. He felt slightly hypocritical inasmuch as it was one upon which he had made no joke or comment, but, as Letty had wished to do with hers, tucked it away to read in private.

"Poor child!" he said to himself. "To think *that* woman has brought her up! What can her life have been?"

Then he fell to studying the letter, which was in Rita Carlisle's exquisite writing, and informed him with malicious glee that she was surprised to learn that her dear little ward, Letty Marsh, had eloped with his nephew, and hoped that he did not look too unfavorably upon the curious union.

"I want to see you very much on a matter of personal interest to us both," she added. "Let me know when I may come to Beltingham, and where it will be most convenient for us to meet. In accordance with our agreement when we parted I do not call myself Lady Tavenor, but use the name of Carlisle, that being my maiden name, which perhaps you did not know, since I was a widow when we perpetrated our unfortunate marriage."

Sir William frowned heavily, made a note of Mrs. Carlisle's address, and destroyed her letter.

"Better see her," he muttered to himself. "Wonder what particular mouse-hole the cat's watching this time? Well, we shall soon find out."

CHAPTER XIII.

CONDEMNED.

SEVERAL days later it was Letty's experience to be present at an extraordinary tribunal at which she, herself, was not the culprit.

Her presence was an accident, and came about through Julia's solicitous desire for

her company on a morning round of charity and exhortation. First they visited the women's hospital where Julia had game and jelly to dispense, and a few comments to give the matron on the subject of a Mrs. Beeman who wished to go back to her family when her baby was but a week old. Julia was nothing if not humane, and censured the matron sharply for being inclined to side with Mrs. Beeman in this extraordinary request.

"You know perfectly well, matron, that it's a rule of the institution for the mothers to have three weeks' complete rest. She doesn't have to worry about her home. The daily woman is looking after that. The children have their dinner at school, and Beeman's is arranged for at the Community Restaurant."

"Yes, I know." The matron dropped her eyes and coughed. "I hate to keep troubling you, Miss Tavenor, but the truth is the poor thing's worrying herself half to death over—over Beeman and that Howland girl. Her friends come and tell her such stories, and she thinks if she could only get home—"

Julia interrupted impatiently.

"Tell Mrs. Beeman that neither she, nor anybody else, will have to endure Grace Howland much longer. More I can't say, just now. But you can take my word for it, that the nuisance will end very soon."

"Oh, that's good news, indeed!" breathed the matron, thankfully.

Letty had heard Grace Howland mentioned before, and her curiosity was aroused as she passed out into the rather barren hospital garden with Julia.

"What sort of a girl is she—Grace Howland?" Letty asked of the tight-lipped Julia.

"You'll soon see. She's finished giving trouble, and now she's going to be a horrible example. Father has sent for her this morning, and it's my painful duty to be present at the interview. You can come, too, if you like. It will give you an idea of some of the things we have to contend with in Beltingham."

Letty shivered as she thought of the culprit, however wicked she might be, brought up before Sir William and Julia. At first

she felt that she could not endure to be present at such an ordeal, but Julia reassured her with a laugh.

"You needn't worry, Letty. Grace loves an audience. It would distress her very much if there was no one to hear her cheek father."

That sounded interesting, for Letty could not imagine any one having the temerity to be saucy to Sir William, least of all one of his own factory girls. She herself had failed at the first and feeblest attempt.

It was about eleven o'clock when they crossed the square, around which were arranged the vast sheds of the iron works. Except for the time-keeper at the gate, the place was deserted, but the unceasing clang, clash and roar proclaimed the busiest hour of the day inside those Titan hives.

Grace Howland was already in the office when Letty and Julia arrived. Also there was present a clean-looking, honest young fellow who turned out to be Craig, one of the foremen, who wanted to marry her.

Uncle Bill, bland of countenance behind his desk, reminded Letty of what she had gone through a few mornings since, and she felt a guilty, uneasy shrinking as she glanced briefly at the Howland girl.

What she saw startled her, for the girl's face was so familiar that she felt surely she had seen her before—even known her. She wasn't in the least like Letty had imagined, either. Letty had thought of her as a sullenly defiant, full-blown, and perhaps coarse type of beauty.

Instead, she was a small, slight girl, undeveloped for her years, which Julia had stated were twenty; and she had a pale skin and perfectly modeled features, very fine in cast and expression. Her hair was dark and shining, parted smoothly down the middle and arranged in a careless knot at the nape of her neck. Over her shoulders hung a gaily-colored fringed shawl; below that a black stuff skirt billowed generously, and on her feet were heavy clogs. She wore great gold hoops in her ears, and except for the lack of a head-dress reminded Letty of a Neapolitan fisher-girl.

"And why," Sir William was asking patiently, when they came in—"why won't you marry Craig?—as good and steady a

young fellow as you could hope to find, earning fine wages, with every prospect of increase, and very, very fond of you, Grace. The way you are carrying on brings misery to everybody else, and can only end in misery for yourself."

Craig shuffled his feet, and the girl, after a malevolent glance at Julia, shrugged her slender shoulders.

"I sha'n't marry anybody until I'm ready," she said.

Her voice was low and quiet, and remarkably free of accent.

"Well, of course I can't force you to do that," Sir William replied. "If Craig's persuasions have failed, then I can do nothing on that score. My daughter has had a painful task of collecting all this evidence against you—"

"Painful!" the girl cried, her eyes crinkling with amusement. "Why, Sir William, Miss Tavenor's fair enjoyed herself every minute. Don't pity Miss Tavenor, sir. Say what you please about me—believe what you please—but don't tell me she's sorry for all I'm supposed to have done."

Letty's heart throbbed in sudden sympathy. This girl had found Julia out, and disliked and resented her.

But what had Grace Howland done?

She followed up her opinion of Julia with a request to be told, and Julia was ready for her. The charge sheet certainly sounded ominous, but was vague as to details.

She had tried to "break up homes," and she had "tried to separate lovers," but in not one single case was it proved that she had succeeded. She had worn an extravagant costume at one of the fancy dress balls and danced a Spanish fandango all by herself. She had placed a bet on the Derby and won six pounds for a shilling on a lucky long-shot.

She went to football matches with men who left their own wives at home; or at least she had been noticed in the company of one such man. She incited the few women she happened to be on friendly terms with, to revolt against the beneficent attentions of the elder Miss Tavenor. She went neither to church nor chapel, but on three separate occasions had given a spectacular show in the street of being con-

verted by the Salvation Army—and had back-slid every time.

"I never did," she said solemnly to this last charge. "God knows my heart. I never back-slid once—but I did get converted several times. When I hear the music, I can't help it. There's so much in life that you can't help, Sir William. You get it down here."

To illustrate, she placed a hand on the lower portion of her diaphragm, and young Craig shuffled sympathetically. He, too, had got it down there where she was concerned. He gazed at her piteously. If only she would marry him and so settle the whole unpleasant business. Just why she wouldn't was certainly a puzzle, for she made no secret of her liking for him, and in his heart of hearts he vowed that Grace was more sinned against than sinning.

He knew how men chased after her. He knew that she couldn't help being full of the joy of life, and very, very different from the other girls of Beltingham. That was why he loved her and why, no matter what anybody said—even Miss Tavenor—he was ready to stand by and offer himself as the lesser of the two evils she might have to choose.

"But the thing we have to consider most of all," Sir William said slowly, his eyes hard and coldly fierce, "is the death of Sammy Evans."

Letty started, and allowed herself to look at Grace Howland. The latter's face became pinched, and she leaned forward with her hands outstretched.

"I only ask for justice, sir. Sammy hanged himself, and they said 'twas because he'd lost money on the gee-gees; and then somebody started a story that I'd put the money on for him. That wasn't true, sir. Why, I scarcely knew Sammy."

"You were with him at the cup tie between Beltingham and Carchester," Julia put in. "It was the very same afternoon. You were seen drinking with him."

"S'help me, sir, don't listen to her. You were there, weren't you, Alf? Drinking! What did I have?"

Craig cleared his throat, and made an effort to save a desperate situation.

"Grace never touched nothing but gin-

ger-beer, sir. And it's true she'd only met poor Sammy that day. He was half gone with the drink already, and Grace would help him and kept telling him to cheer up and not worry about the money he'd lost. That's how it started, I suppose. Her trying to do him a good turn."

Sir William, however, was not impressed.

"It's got to end," he said curtly. "My patience is worn out. You refuse to behave yourself, Grace; you won't marry Craig, who's ready and willing, and altogether you're an evil influence at the works. Now you can go. The paymaster will give you two weeks' wages in lieu of notice. That's more than fair. If you feel the slightest inclination to do Beltingham a good turn, you'll clear out of the town. Your talents, such as they are, are not appreciated here. And if you choose to hang about and play your old games, it won't be long before you find yourself in the police station."

The girl held her head high, and her cheeks, hitherto pale, were flaming.

"I'll do both Beltingham and myself a good turn," she said shortly. "I'll clear out of the place to-night. You can keep your rotten wages, or I'll be happy to make a present of 'em to Miss Tavenor for a new hat. She needs one something shocking."

Well, this was evidently what Julia had meant when she had said Grace Howland would "cheek" her father.

Letty trembled for the wrath that must come. Instead, Sir William adjusted his eyeglasses, and stared hard at the unbecoming headgear which adorned Julia's pale hair.

"By jove, the girl's right! Thank you very much, Grace. Now you can go. What I said, stands. I shall be very glad to hear that you've left Beltingham."

Letty felt that she could not breathe until she got outside and quite clear of the works.

That poor girl! She had certainly, from Letty's point of view, made a fairly decent case for herself. At least she hadn't been proved guilty of anything. Yet Sir William had condemned her.

What, if he knew *her* history, would he do to Letty? She lived under his roof, she

was Derrick's wife, and the companion of Julia and Maud. She was living at Tavenor Court under false pretences.

Julia was murmuring something about being thankful, the worry was all over if Grace Howland kept her word, and they stood waiting for the car that was to take them back to Tavenor Court, when a slim, elegantly clad figure crossed the quadrangle from the direction of the railway station which was close by.

"What a very smart woman!" exclaimed Julia. "She must have lost her way. She can't be coming here."

Letty's soul shriveled into nothingness. The very smart woman was Rita Carlisle.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN APPOINTMENT WITH SIR WILLIAM.

LETTY'S first thought was that Mrs. Carlisle had come to tell Sir William what she knew about the death of Gerald Stansbury, but reflection rather negatived that idea. Unless Roger had mentioned it, Rita might not connect the Tavenors with that dreadful affair, and if she did she would scarcely refer to it, for her own sake.

And then Letty remembered the woman's scornful claim to be Sir William Tavenor's wife.

She glanced quickly at Julia, who certainly did not recognize Mrs. Carlisle, nor did the latter appear to know who she was.

The woman came toward them quickly, holding out her hands to Letty and smiling.

"Well met, my dear! I was hoping later to pay my respects to you. How jolly, running into you like this! I do hope you are as happy as you deserve to be, you naughty girl."

Her glance strayed with bright inquiry to Julia, and Letty was forced to introduce them. Vivid admiration glowed in Julia's pale eyes. She thought Mrs. Carlisle a wonderful looking woman.

"Ah, Miss Tavenor—Derrick's cousin, eh? I think I've heard a lot about you from him. I suppose you are 'Julia,' the one he admires so violently."

Julia flushed with pleasure as she admitted her identity, and Letty winced.

Had Derrick spoken a great deal about Julia to Rita Carlisle? Another thorn was driven into the unhappy soul of the bride.

They stood for a few moments chatting in the quadrangle, and then the midday whistle blew, the great gates swung open, all the hammers ceased as if by magic, and a tide of humanity began to stream out and past them.

"Dear me, it's twelve o'clock!" Rita exclaimed.

"Of course you'll drive back to Tavenor Court with us for lunch," Julia suggested eagerly.

The woman shook her head, still smiling.

"I have an appointment with your father, Miss Tavenor. Some of my little savings are invested in Tavenor's, and Sir William particularly wants to see me on business. I mustn't keep him waiting."

How much of this was true, and how much false, Letty wondered.

Julia, however, accepted the explanation without question. It did not seem strange to her that anybody should have money in Tavenor's. The list of shareholders was formidable, and there easily might be a Rita Carlisle amongst them.

"But we could wait lunch for you," Julia argued, "and send the car back."

Mrs. Carlisle, however, shook her head more firmly than before.

"I really couldn't promise. But if there's time, and you wouldn't mind having me, perhaps I can manage to run out for tea."

All the time they were speaking her hard, bright eyes seemed intent upon the stream of work-people, particularly upon the women, drab for the most part, but picturesque here and there, particularly amongst the young girls.

"What will she tell Uncle Bill!" Letty moaned to herself, her spirit absolutely crushed.

The car came for Letty and Julia; they said *au revoir* to Mrs. Carlisle, and were whisked away while she proceeded toward the entrance to the works.

"I have an appointment with Sir William," she said in her sharp commanding way to the man in the porter's lodge. "My name is Mrs. Carlisle."

The porter set aside his dinner-pail and communicated the message by means of an electric bell and speaking-tube to some one else, and presently Mrs. Carlisle, with skirts held daintily to avoid contamination, was being led down corridors to a lift and so on through various passages to the room where Grace Howland had recently been judged.

It had been more than twenty years since she and this man who was legally her husband had parted. They had lived together in all only three months, and the whole of that time had been spent at or near Monte Carlo.

Mrs. Carlisle had never visited Beltingham before, and the aspect of the smoke-stained little city disgusted her. How could she have ever imagined herself capable of marriage with a man content to drag out his days in such surroundings? She wondered if he was much changed in appearance.

Of course he had had a "stroke." She knew of that. It had followed closely upon certain unpleasant discoveries he had made concerning her. It gave her a malicious sense of satisfaction to believe that doubtless she was responsible for his being eternally tied to a chair.

CHAPTER XV.

RITA SCORES.

SIR WILLIAM had sent out for his lunch, as he always did when he stopped all day at the works. Because he had given an appointment to the woman who in point of law was his wife, he saw no reason to alter his personal habits in any way.

The tray was set before him on his desk, and in the eyes of a gourmet would have presented no temptation to appetite. The crockery was thick and sticky-looking. Two slices of bread and margarine on one plate were flanked right and left by a cup of indifferent tea and a larger plate holding a slab of roast beef, watery-looking cabbage, and boiled potatoes. At one side was a saucer of pasty rice-pudding, and a section of mouldy cheese.

Yet Sir William ate with relish. A hungry man is not fastidious as to his food.

Mrs. Carlisle was slightly chagrined to find him at this sordid occupation. She had expected him to be waiting in a state of suspense—grim, perhaps, but anxious.

Instead he greeted her unconsciously, flourishing a fork as he bade her take a chair. Would she like a lunch tray brought in for herself? And he hoped she didn't mind his going on with his meal.

She said no, decidedly and acidly to both questions, so he didn't press the invitation, and continued eating.

"The manners and tastes of a pig!" she observed scornfully to herself.

But it wasn't because he was hungry and could eat without questioning the daintiness of what was put before him that she really felt so scornful. She was disappointed in not making more of an impression upon him. She had kept her appearance and the illusion of youth, while he was a broken, grizzled-haired old man in a wheel-chair.

Yet he was not impressed at all. He had looked at her once—and grunted. Altogether a pig. Nor did he seem any more interested than the animal to which she likened him, to know the important personal business which had brought her there.

Sir William's greatest strength lay in his ability to play a waiting game. He was never in a hurry. He had been in no hurry even about Grace Howland until circumstances forced his hand.

She was obliged finally to broach the subject, herself.

"I suppose you think I've come here for money," she said sharply.

Sir William pushed back the tray. He had finished, although omitting the rice pudding. He leaned back in the chair and adjusted his eyeglasses.

"Such an idea never occurred to me. It would be impossible."

The woman shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows, although she, too, knew how impossible it was. As far as money was concerned, she was bound hard and fast by an iron-clad legal agreement. She could not get another penny out of

him, alive or dead. If she tried to sully his memory, even, she would do so at the certain peril of finding herself clapped into jail for an old crime that the police had never forgotten nor forgiven. She was an outlaw against society, and held no power of blackmail over Sir William Tavenor. The Iron Man had left no loophole for anything of that description.

"Then what did you imagine I wanted to see you for?" she asked.

"I am not good at riddles," Sir William replied, in his blandly pleasant fashion. "I never by any chance hit on the right answer. Perhaps it's something to do with our little Letty."

Her lips curled in scornful triumph.

"It hasn't," she said.

"Well, I knew I would be wrong. When you get ready, I suppose you'll enlighten me. Meanwhile—do you mind if I smoke?"

Without waiting for a reply, he took a cigar from the case in his pocket, clipped the end neatly with a silver instrument which had been a schoolboy Christmas gift from Derrick, and put a match to it.

Viewed gastronomically, his lunch was bad, but no connoisseur in such matters could have found fault with his cigar.

Mrs. Carlisle drummed impatient fingertips on the arm of her chair. The waiting game was getting on her nerves.

She began her story abruptly, with none of the little feline leadings-up-to that she had promised herself. The Iron Man's self-determination wore her down now, precisely as it had on an occasion in the past. Before him she was stripped of those arts and subterfuges which had distinguished her inglorious career.

"Seven months after we agreed to part," she said stridently, "I gave birth to a child—a girl. It's concerning her that I've forced this interview upon you."

Even then, Sir William did not seem greatly startled. He merely arrested the hand that held his cigar.

"No doubt you will want proofs. Well, I can give them to you. I have them here." She tapped her hand-bag. "But first, perhaps, you'd like to hear about it."

"I should," he replied. Then added: "It is not impossible, of course. Girls are

rather a hobby of mine, and perhaps for Derrick's sake, it's just as well you didn't make it a boy."

"You don't believe me—but I have every proof."

The deadly quiet of her statement threw him just the slightest degree off his balance.

"I wouldn't believe your unbacked word for a million sterling!" he exclaimed.

"Must you always think in terms of money? And you can have but a poor opinion of any woman's intelligence if you imagine she would venture to come to you with such a story if it could not be supported. I, knowing you, would not dream of such madness.

"Personally, I have nothing to gain or lose. I don't care a rap about the girl. I have no maternal instinct, whatsoever. I am being very frank with you, because when it suits my purpose frankness becomes a virtue. I have lied to others many times—but never to myself—and there are moments when I even tell the truth."

She leaned forward, slightly grotesque, almost impossible in the illusion of youth she embodied.

"I had no wish to be burdened with that child of yours. When she was six months' old I left her with a foundling asylum—to the kind charity of the world. Lately it interested me to learn what had become of her. Well, I found out—and it was so humorous, as affecting you, that I thought you really ought to know."

The Iron Man leaned forward, and dropped a heavy, clenched fist upon the table so that all the crockery danced.

"By Heaven, woman, if what you say is true, then you are a worse fiend, even, than I ever took you for!"

Rita threw back her head and laughed. This was the sort of joke she could enjoy thoroughly.

"That's impossible," she sneered. "But let me get on with my story. A short while ago I went to the asylum and identified myself as the mother of the child I had left with them some nineteen years previously. It was not at all difficult to trace her, for they keep very careful records. She had been adopted by a respectable working-class couple, an iron-moulder and his wife.

"These people moved here, to Beltingham, and the man was employed in your foundries until he died some five or six years ago. When that happened, the adopted daughter had to go out to work. Indeed, I dare say she would have had to do so sooner or later in any case. But she was only fourteen when she began in the packing rooms at Tavenor's, and there she is to-day—your daughter and mine; the daughter of the woman who wasn't good enough to take her rightful place before the world as your wife. I had hoped to be revenged upon you, but this is better than I thought. Here, have a look for yourself."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

She dived down into her bag and brought forth a neatly-tied sheaf of papers which she tossed contemptuously upon the desk.

Sir William laid aside his cigar and picked up the bundle, his fingers fumbling awkwardly to undo the string, while Rita Carlisle strolled serenely to the window and stood gazing down upon the vast yards.

Suddenly he gave a cry, followed by a terse exclamation:

"Grace Howland!"

Mrs. Carlisle turned sharply.

"Yes, that's her name—Howland was the name of her foster parents. Do you happen to know her?"

Metamorphosis of Maynard

By Garret Smith



R ALPH MAYNARD set his battered suit-case in front of the great Grecian temple of a railroad station from which he had just emerged, straightened his tall, sinewy young form and filled his lungs with a deep breath of satisfaction. A week of sweating on hot trains had erased the bronzing of Oklahoma sunlight from his strong features. His face was pale and drawn from inability to sleep in day coaches, and his economy in the diner. A week of trying to make night-clothes out of his cheap, ready-made suit gave him a tramp-like appearance, heightened by his shock of unbarbered brown hair. Pinned to the inside of his shirt was half of his entire

capital, five hundred dollars in bills of varying sizes.

But his gray eyes shone with the light of anticipated victory. For his head harbored an idea worth a million dollars and he was here to cash it.

Opposite stood one of New York's biggest and most expensive hotels. Maynard knew it from its pictures, though this was his first trip to the metropolis. As his eye traveled up story after story of the massive pile, he thrilled with excitement.

"A week from now, maybe sooner, there's where I'll be stopping," he gloated. "Mean time, me for the cheapest haymow I can find for a few days yet."

For ten years Ralph Maynard had slaved, first as chore-boy, then laborer, and finally as chemical engineer in the oil-fields. He had been taken to Oklahoma as a child by his father, a consumptive professor of chemistry in search of health. His mother had died at his birth. The elder Maynard had lost his fight for life when Ralph was fifteen, leaving him friendless and penniless. But he had bequeathed his son a sound character, an acute mind and the foundation of a chemical education.

Ralph had gone to work, but kept up his studies. At twenty he was a full-fledged chemical engineer. And he was bitten with the virus of invention.

When he was twenty-two came the great scheme, an economical method of extracting oil from common clay. Three years later he found the raw material he needed in a barren and isolated thousand-acre ranch far from the exploited oil-fields and for sale cheap. For five hundred dollars, nearly half his savings, he got a sixty-day option.

At first he tried to borrow money to complete the purchase. He was laughed at. A clay patch that would hardly support cactus and was poor grazing-ground for goats offered insufficient security for a loan.

Ralph had been too much engrossed in his work to make friends. So he was handicapped in seeking financial aid.

He met with equally poor success when he divulged a little of his carefully guarded secret and went after a partner. Some considered him merely an impractical dreamer. Others asked crafty questions and then set their own chemists to work to ferret out the rest of the secret for themselves.

Thus he wasted a fruitless month. The net result was to spread rumors that started an oil boom in the clay-fields. All other available land in the region of the ranch on which he held option was snapped up. Land values there rocketed up over night. He saw that if he let his option expire he would never again get a bargain in clay land and his little funds would be gone anyhow.

Then the last operator he approached gave him an idea.

"This is no country to catch that kind

of come-ons in, son," he advised. "Go to New York. That's the happy fishing-ground for suckers. There's old Mortimer Haskell for instance. He's played with oil schemes for years. Lost a lot, but made more. He'll try anything once."

So here Maynard was in New York and three weeks to run before his option expired. He found a shabby little hotel whose price suited him. How was he to know of the unsavory reputation of the place or of the need of a good address if one were to do business in New York advantageously?

He was equally unconscious of the importance of personal appearance. He bathed, shaved, and brushed his clothes thoroughly and was well enough satisfied with the result. Not that he thought he was well dressed. But he would pass in the oil-fields. As far as he thought of his appearance at all he felt confident that the men he saw here would accept him as a man dressed in keeping with his work and position.

Hence, full of assurance, he set out to see Haskell. Then to his disgust he found that the big city overawed him. His experience with towns of any size other than mushroom oil-camps was limited. He had missed the broadening experience that the World War had brought to so many. His regiment had never got beyond the training-camp a few miles from his home country.

But when at length he found the building that housed the Haskell offices, he shook off his shyness angrily and strode into the ante-room with exaggerated boldness.

A languid and supercilious boy stopped him as he was about to invade the office beyond.

"Who'd yer wanner see?"

"Mr. Haskell. Is he in?"

"Got'n 'pointment?"

"What?" Maynard demanded, beginning to be irritated.

"Got'n 'pointment, I sez. Can't see 'nobody 'thout'n 'pointment."

"All right, kid, I'll make an appointment. Hop in pronto and tell the boss I'm here."

"Cher name down there," grunted the youth, shoving a pad toward the caller.

Maynard gritted his teeth, but obeyed.

"Yer bizness," snapped the boy, pushing the pad back at him.

"See here, you," Maynard roared, leaning over the youth in a way that at last weakened the youngster's truculence a little. "My business is with your boss, not with you."

He reached over the desk, seized the struggling youngster by the ear, jerked him to his feet, and thrust the announcement slip into his hand.

"Now go in and tell Mr. Haskell I want to see him and that my business is private."

Maynard cooled a little while he waited and realized he had made a bad start. Presently an indignant young man in shirt-sleeves came out of the inner office.

"What is it you want?" he demanded.

"I want to see Mr. Haskell on private business. Your boy was impudent and I lost my temper. I'm sorry, but I must see Mr. Haskell right away. It's important and I can only explain it to him."

"Well, suppose you write his secretary for an appointment," suggested the young man, seeing a way to get out from under the disagreeable job of dealing with a dangerous looking crank as he believed.

Maynard, chastened a little by his experience and seeing no other way, agreed and departed down-hearted enough.

Two days later he started again for Haskell's office. He had written Haskell's secretary and was on his way to see why he had no answer. Maynard's note as a matter of fact had been promptly classified with the crank letters that poured in every day and the usual perfunctory reply had not gone out yet.

Maynard, though he haunted the office day after day, never got farther than the office boy. Even his attempts to see Haskell's secretary failed. The fellow, take it from the boy of the injured ear, divided his day between conferences and luncheon.

He tried writing again and at last got a note saying Mr. Haskell was not interested. It was signed by a wavy, noncommittal line. He tried the telephone, but never got beyond the ear of the assistant secretary, which he longed to treat as he had that of the office boy.

Then he took to calling at the Haskell

home in the evening only to come to the conclusion that the oil man didn't stick around the house much.

So a precious week slipped away. He realized now he should have come armed with letters of introduction. In desperation he telegraphed the prospector who had first mentioned Haskell to him to wire back to some New York acquaintance asking him to introduce Maynard to Haskell. But the Oklahoma man had reasons for not caring to godfather the young chemist's scheme.

The second of Maynard's three weeks of grace found him desperate and discouraged. He kept up his vain efforts to see Haskell and in addition tried to get at other promoters, but with no better success, and another futile week passed.

The confinement of city life, the unwholesome hot-box in which he slept, when the unholy tumult without allowed, the limited quantities of dubious stuff he ate at the dirty basement restaurant around the corner, were gnawing at the underpinnings of his health. His discouragement was an evil ally of these material agencies. Physically and mentally underdone, Maynard was losing his grit.

Two more days at the outside were left him. It would take at least five more to get back to Oklahoma and close the deal before the option expired.

He thought it over dejectedly sitting on the edge of his narrow bed that blue Monday morning. Suddenly something seemed to snap within him. He gave up, surrendered unconditionally.

Hastily he packed his big suit-case, paid his bill, and started for the station. He was heartily sick of New York. He was just a tired, discouraged, homesick boy and he wanted to go home.

Then it came over him that he had no real home to go to. Back to Oklahoma? Yes. But where in all that unlovely wilderness of oil-camps was any definite place he could truly call home?

He was at the moment passing the big hotel that had attracted his attention the day he arrived. Well-dressed men and women, carefree and confident, were passing in and out, citizens of the world he had expected to enter. He recalled with heart-

sick regret the confident prediction he had made in this very spot two weeks before.

Suddenly he dropped his suit-case and stared at the pillared entrance as though he were propounding a question to the state-ly inn. Whether or not the mouth of the hospitable behemoth gave answer, the young man came to a conclusion whimsical as it was sudden.

He had left in his pocket not quite four hundred dollars. Such a pitiful sum could mean little in the colorless future that lay ahead of him. It could mean much in coloring his future dreams. He would dedicate it to twenty-four hours of living as he had hoped to live for the rest of his days. He would snatch from the metropolis at least that shimmering fragment of the dream it had shattered.

Just before dinner that evening a well-groomed young man alighted from a taxicab in front of the big hotel and handed a new suit-case to an obsequious porter. Following Maynard's inspiration that morning, he had by good chance accosted a human and Broadwaywise policeman and put to him some intimate personal questions. He had then gone hence and placed himself in the hands of an emporium advertising quick fitting in nobby semiready garments, a sort of gentlemen-rebuilt-while-you-wait establishment. A barber, a manicure, a Turkish bath and a luncheon at a good restaurant had completed the metamorphosis of Maynard, external and internal.

The desk to which the porter piloted him, with its bewildering corps of clerks, loomed up as formidably as the bridge of a battleship. His past experience had been entirely with one-man affairs. But he watched a guest ahead register and felt competent when his turn came.

"Something for about twelve dollars, Mr. Howard?" the clerk had asked the man before him.

Maynard was agreeably surprised. Twelve dollars a week wasn't so exorbitant as he had expected. He might stay two days at that rate.

He boldly signed for a twelve-dollar room. Just in time, too, he noted that the arrival ahead of him tipped the porter who brought in his bag. It was a fortunate

hint that saved the novice from the wrong start.

The porter properly tipped and gone, Maynard turned to pick up his suit-case and that had gone, too. He turned back to the desk in alarm when he saw a bell-boy with his suit-case waiting to show him to his room. Maynard flushed with embarrassment. The cold eye of the haughty clerk was fixed on him in supercilious inquiry.

To cover his confusion, Maynard said inanely enough the first thing that popped into his head, the query he had been making fruitlessly day after day.

"Has Mr. Mortimer Haskell come in yet?" he asked.

The clerk's estimate of Maynard suddenly changed. That was a name to conjure with. Any well-dressed guest inquiring in such offhand manner for such a well-known personage must be considerable personage himself.

"No, I haven't seen him," the clerk answered all eagerness to serve now. "If you were expecting to meet him here I'll have him paged."

"Oh, no, thanks," replied the suffering youth. "He'll ask for me at the desk if he wants to look me up."

With that he bolted to the elevator.

Maynard was amazed at the magnificence of his twelve-dollar room, and in his astonishment and unsophistication gave the bell-hop a fee so large that the youth spread his reputation to every tip-collector in the place.

Maynard donned his new dinner clothes as per instruction of his outfitter and, after mastering the details of his chamber and the printed instructions to guests, ventured forth again.

The zest of the new game he was playing drove out of his mind for the moment the crushing disappointment he had suffered. It was having the effect that liquor would have had on a different kind of a man. A good dinner in the great dining-room completed his adaption to the unfamiliar rôle, superficially at least. His gentleman-father had taught him table manners that had persisted in spite of the influence of the oil camps. Surreptitious watching of the man

at the next table steered him through the intricacies of the *menu* and the table service. The music of the orchestra inspired him.

But by the end of the meal homesick loneliness caught him again. He had expected to make agreeable chance acquaintances. In the lobby he became conscious that in all the gay throng there was a general aloofness toward strangers.

To tide over his loneliness he went to a theater and saw the most talked about play of the fall season. Between acts, to prevent a return of dark thoughts, he read the paper through. When he returned to the hotel he was well posted on a variety of up-to-date topics of conversation, but he had nobody on whom to air them.

He was standing disconsolately near the desk when a rugged, prosperous-looking, elderly man hurried up and was greeted affably by the clerk as Mr. Coddington, evidently an honored patron of the hotel.

"I was to meet a gentleman here at eleven o'clock," he began. Then he caught sight of Maynard, who was moving aimlessly away again.

"That may be he now," Coddington exclaimed and hurried after him.

Maynard's stock rose another notch in the eyes of the watching-clerk.

Maynard felt a touch on his arm.

"This is Mr. Rudolph, of Arizona, isn't it?" asked some one. "I'm Coddington. Hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"I'm sorry," Maynard replied, "but I'm afraid you're mistaken. I'm from the Southwest, but not Arizona. Oklahoma is my State, and my name isn't Rudolph."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," apologized Coddington. "I was to meet a man I've never seen before. You looked as if you might be waiting for some one."

Then Maynard's clean-cut, upstanding appearance caught his notice and interested him.

"So you're from the Southwest, too," Coddington went on. "I'm always glad to see home folks. I'm fresh from Southern California myself, only a year away. I haven't been in Oklahoma in years. How are things coming out there?"

They chatted pleasantly for a few moments. Maynard, in his relief at finding

some one to talk to, held him as long as possible and had some things to say about the oil-fields that were of real interest to Coddington.

They had edged over to the desk by now. The clerk said "Good evening, Mr. Maynard," in his most cordial manner, and Coddington considered their introduction complete. A hotel clerk is host and *cicerone* extraordinary. In each other's presence they had both been recognized as men of standing by that same august person. It was almost as good as a formal introduction.

"I find a note here saying Mr. Rudolph couldn't come," Coddington explained a moment later. "My wife and daughter and a young friend of ours are in the café for supper and I'm to meet them there. I'd be glad to have you join us. I want to hear more about Oklahoma."

And so Maynard met Helen Coddington. In his crowded life had been little room for girls. He had never met one like Helen before—dark, tiny, brimful of vitality and, to his eye, gloriously beautiful. She had a way, too, of making a bashful young man feel at ease.

Not that he had much to say to Helen. He couldn't talk girl-talk. Anyhow, the friend whom Coddington had mentioned, a milk-fed, blond, young fop, kept her busy dancing and chatting twaddle between dances. Maynard desired his sudden death earnestly, preferably at Maynard's own hands. Maynard had to confess to his shame that he had always been too busy to learn to dance, which quite won the approval of the old people who were not strong for the milk-fed ornament.

But the young woman listened with one ear to Maynard's tales of Oklahoma, despite her uninterested dance partner's asides. Later Maynard got a direct hearing with her for a few minutes while he discussed the play he had seen that evening.

Altogether the family was well impressed. Maynard, in his talk, revealed little of his own history, but they gathered from chance allusions that his father had been a college professor and that the son had made his own way to a considerable height. They noted that he was not extravagant either in his dress or in the nature of his supper order.

As they said good night, Helen gave him her hand and a friendly smile with it.

"It seems so good to meet some one from home," she said. "You know the South-west will always be real home to me."

"Did your friend, Mr. Maynard, finally get in touch with Mortimer Haskell?" asked the clerk as Coddington was getting his mail. "They had an appointment, but missed each other."

So this young man was the sort who had dealings with the great Haskell? On the whole, Coddington did not regret that he had introduced the young stranger to his family.

Maynard, in his room, was deciding his adventure was a success and bemoaning its brevity.

He saw much of the Coddingtons during the remainder of his two days' allotted stay in paradise, for such the big hotel had become from the moment he had looked into the eyes of Helen. At the end he approached the desk to pay his bill and check out like a man going to his execution. For two days he had been for once his real potential self, and it was over. And then, too, he would probably never see Helen Coddington again.

He had remaining just enough money, as he figured, to pay his bill. He counted on selling his new outfit for enough to take him home.

Then he looked at his bill and things went black for a moment. The bill was over six times what he had figured and he couldn't pay it.

A brief inspection revealed the childish error he had made when he registered. Of course his room was twelve dollars a day, and not a week, as he had naively assumed. To make matters worse he had unwittingly stayed over a half-hour into a third day and for that day he must also pay.

He was a prisoner in the big hotel. To attempt to leave without settling his bill or to admit that he couldn't pay it at once meant exposure and probable arrest.

The cashier was waiting inquiringly. He must have time to think.

"I've just happened to recall an appointment for to-morrow that I had overlooked. I'll stay on another day," he announced.

He pushed back the bill and hurried off. It would cost no more to stay out the extra day he would have to pay for anyhow, he thought. Youthful optimism, braced by two days of good food and clothes, stimulating companionship and a new environment, was already whispering that he could find a way out in that time.

For one thing, why hadn't it occurred to him before that he could take up the option on his clay land by wire? That reopened the possibility of marketing his great scheme after all. He could make another try at Haskell now with more assurance.

When he put it to trial that evening, Haskell's butler did not recognize in the well-groomed young gentleman the shabby pest he had rebuffed on his own responsibility so many evenings. He addressed the caller most deferentially, but regretted that Mr. Haskell was out of town and might be gone for several days. This time he seemed so sincere that Maynard believed him.

With some further misgivings he put the date of departure still further off. The chance of seeing the oil man at last seemed enough brighter to be worth the risk. At any rate, as far as the hotel bill went he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

So he stayed on, seeing more of the Coddingtons, Helen in particular, and meeting several of their friends. But Friday arrived and Haskell had not returned. Saturday at midnight the option expired.

Maynard now owed the hotel more money than he could possibly realize from selling his outfit, to say nothing of the price of a ticket home. His pocket money was about gone. He had no jewelry to pawn.

In his extremity he approached Coddington on the subject of investing in his scheme or suggesting friends who would be interested. Coddington froze up perceptibly. After all, the older man thought, this young fellow was merely a slick promoter who had wormed his way into his good graces for his own profit. He would have nothing to do with it and told Maynard so.

"Anyhow," he added, "I understood from some one around here that you were dickering with Mortimer Haskell. If he won't touch it nobody else will."

While Maynard was still ruminating bitterly over this final fiasco the officious hotel clerk again took a hand in his affairs.

Sedgwick, of the *Morning Mirror*, who covered hotels, stopped at the desk.

"Any big bugs in to-day, Tommy?" he asked the clerk.

"Why, yes. There's Ralph Maynard right over there by the pillar. Oil man from Oklahoma. Here after more capital."

Sedgwick went over, introduced himself and pumped Maynard for half an hour about the oil-fields. Maynard didn't realize until he read the paper next morning at breakfast how much the interviewer had learned. There, to his amazement and consternation, he read a long and garbled interview with himself which gave a version of his plans just enough different from what he had told Coddington to finish his estrangement there. He was described as a rich oil operator from Oklahoma who was closing a deal here for promoting a new oil extraction process with a prominent New York capitalist, name not given.

He reentered the lobby with the uncomfortable feeling that all eyes were turned on him accusingly. He was a hunted animal at bay.

"Mr. May-nard. Mr. May-nard," droned a page near by.

Maynard's heart missed a beat. Why was he wanted? He had a desire to turn and run, but the page was the boy he had tipped so liberally the first day. He remembered Maynard and sidled up to him while he was hesitating.

"Wanted at the desk, Mr. Maynard," declared the youngster.

They were after a settlement of his bill at last! He groped his way to the desk.

"Here is Mr. Maynard," beamed the clerk, addressing a stout, elderly man with a shrewd but genial face who stood near by.

"This your interview, young man?" he boomed, smiting with a stubby finger a newspaper folded so that the abominable splurge flaunted uppermost.

"Yes," Maynard heard himself saying.

"Come over here. I want to talk to you," commanded the big man, leading the way to a secluded divan.

"I got home last night and saw this first thing this morning. Come right over. If you haven't closed with any one else and this dope is substantially true and you can prove it I want an option and chance to look it up."

"It is substantially true and I can prove it in half an hour if you'll come to my room, and I haven't closed with anybody yet," Maynard managed to say. "But may I ask who you are?"

"Me? Everybody knows me. I'm Mortimer Haskell."

Late that afternoon Maynard dropped limply back in a chair in his twelve-dollar room. In his pocket was an option contract with Haskell, and his check for a thousand dollars. The clay ranch deal had been closed by wire. The big man had just left him.

Maynard then went to the telephone and got Coddington on the phone in his room.

"This is Maynard," he said. "I've just closed my deal with Haskell and want to invite you people to a dinner and theater party to-night to celebrate. It's my last chance for a while. To-morrow I'm going home."

And this time when he said "home" he thought of a certain definite place, a corner lot in the choicest section of Oil City, Oklahoma, where he could see a dream house rising, and in it a certain, definite young woman, the dark-eyed girl who had told him the night they met that the Southwest would always be real home to her.



THE RIGHT WAY

If you pray for a good corn-crop, my son,

The corn will be apt to grow;

And the prayer that's best is the one they make

With a corn-plow and a hoe!

Eugene C. Dolson.

The Knight of Lonely Land

by Evelyn Campbell

Author of "Spark of the Flame," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

BILLIE STRANGER and his partner, Jack Baker, returning to their ranch, the Three Nines, which the former had won from an English waster, Norman Hoyt, in a poker game, find the primitive shack occupied by an upper class English girl and two servants—a butler, Jarro, and Mrs. Moffatt, the housekeeper—old retainers who, on the failure of her family fortunes following the death in the war of her father and brothers, the girl, Geraldine Hoyt, had brought with her to America, in the belief that her uncle, Norman, is a large and wealthy ranch owner.

Dazed and embarrassed the two punchers allow her to infer that they are her uncle's foremen, and pretend to send for him to gain time. Billie is worried because rustlers are active in the valley and he can not afford to lose any of his small head stock, and another complication is threatened, though he does not realize it, by Molly Desmond, known as Little Britches, the pretty and good-hearted but quite untrained and lawless daughter of a shiftless nester.

Going to Cat Fork to buy supplies, Billie is a witness to the shooting—bushwhacking—of a cowboy, Milt Holley, and succeeds in shooting the gun from the hand of the murderer, but too late to save the victim. The assassin, however, escaped in the excitement and no trace of him could be found. Meanwhile things gradually adjusted themselves at the ranch, and Billie managed to effect a horse trade by which he became possessed of a gentle little mare that Geraldine could ride.

CHAPTER X

AN INVITATION TO RIDE

BILLIE went his way in the full consciousness of having performed that remarkable feat known as killing two birds with one stone. All the way home he grinned at the joke which had put him in possession of the horse he desired. He, too, thought of the double brands on the mare's shoulder, but it was with keen satisfaction. He had a deep-rooted conviction that the time was coming when the analyzation of that brand was going to furnish enlightenment upon a serious question.

He was anxious to get home and pushed the sorrel mare rather severely. But she responded with an ease and security which delighted her new owner.

"The poor simp," he chuckled, remembering Camberwell's man, "givin' up a horse like this for th' other one—but then I guess he must've been some uneasy ridin' this filly on the other side of th' Pass over to Prosperity. Now I can guess why them boys come over to the Forks, when it's five miles further and a bad trail all th' way."

He was thinking about the erased brand on the mare's shoulder. He had a bit of evidence in her which Camberwell would have to explain one of these days, and Cooper was gathering all the evidence he could. But it was too soon to play a card now, for the first thing to do was to find the traitor in the valley. There must be one, for the operations on the Circle O property pointed to a well informed hand.

But his elation was tempered by uneas-

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iness that sent his thoughts hurrying ahead to Jack, holding his lonely vigil on the south range. Billie was remorseful for his defection and planned a lengthy narrative, much embellished, for his friend's entertainment that night. He felt a little guilty about the mare as well. He knew that the claim of a gentle, all-purpose horse being needed on the ranch would be fruitless if he hoped so to deceive Jack. It would be instantly plain to that clear sighted person just who was destined to ride the new horse, and for whose purposes he was needed.

And this brought him face to face with the problem of presenting the gift to Miss Hoyt. As usual his courage quailed before it. He thought of a dozen expedients such as leaving the horse saddled before the door, or sending Jarrow in with an humble request that she accept the animal as her own. But a premonition warned him that none of these plans were feasible.

Miss Hoyt was a person to whom approach was not an easy matter. She might misunderstand—she had misunderstood when he refused her request for a horse to ride in the beginning, and when he objected to her walks away from the ranch house. It was the story of Little Britches finding the English girl miles away from home, near Raining Rock, which had sent him to Cat Fork in quest of a horse trade. He was resolved she should not go that far again if he could help it, but he had learned the futility of forbidding her.

A half mile from the ranch house he saw from the winding trail moving figures beyond the corral. He thought of Jack and Jarrow, but the sunlight glinting on a spot of color brought a smile of recognition to his lips. Little Britches was there and it was her hair which had caught the sun. He knew her strange, sullen nature, half passionate, half childish, and thought of many reasons why her undisciplined fancy would have brought her there, but not one was the real one.

He thought she might have fallen under the spell of Geraldine Hoyt's tender femininity and a vision of Little Britches tamed by skirts and conventions made him smile again, but as every yard brought him

nearer, a drama unfolded before his eyes and he smiled no more. For the first time in his life he felt sick and weak.

Little Britches was there sure enough, and her roan horse, close by, stood with his reins hanging, and at a safe distance from the stage of the horror. For horror it was, and only a desperate determination kept his eyes from shutting it away from his brain.

For the other figure was Geraldine Hoyt, and the horse that stood seemingly quiet enough with Little Britches' hand upon its rein was the outlaw, I B Dam.

He tried to think that he was mistaken,—that it was another horse Molly Desmond was persuading Geraldine to mount, but his eyes could not lie. The golden coat, the flowing mane and tail like softest silk could belong to no other. It was the outlaw; the freak of the range whose cruel hoofs had been stained with blood. In a minute, long before he could reach them, he would see the English girl dashed to her death; not for a moment did he doubt that would happen when she touched the saddle—if she ever did.

He was near enough now to see that Geraldine stood beside the horse, her hand resting lightly on his neck while she spoke to the other girl. He dared not ride upon them shouting the warning that was on his lips, or take any measure that would excite the uncertain temper of the outlaw, for the disposition of I B Dam was well known and had earned him his name. No one could predict what he would do in time of stress. He might turn upon the girl and trample her life out in a second, or he might stand quietly as he was standing now, a monument of uncertainty. If only she would delay the attempt to mount until he was near enough to call to her.

It was strange that in this turmoil of uncertainty he thought so little of Molly Desmond or her part in the scene before him. He did wonder, vaguely, how she had managed to bring the outlaw in without help—to saddle and bridle him alone, though this undertaking was not so difficult as it appeared. I B Dam had been bridled many times if he had been mounted but few. It was possible he had followed Little

Britches meekly enough in the absence of the perverse devil that usually controlled his movements. The motive of the girl in doing this thing was a matter he put in the back of his mind, sternly refusing to grant it a moment's hearing. The settlement of that would come later. She could not claim ignorance, for she had been present at the killing of Dan Randolph by this same horse, six months before.

He was near enough to call now and he lifted his voice, trying to keep it steady and free from the cold terror that clutched his heart.

"Don't try to get on that horse. Wait till I get there—for God's sake!"

The last was not entreaty but a sort of prayer, for the warning came too late, or perhaps it served as an urge to hasten the girl on to her adventure.

She looked up and saw him, smiled in a provocative way and swung herself into the saddle as easily as Little Britches herself might have done. Billie had a picture that would last him as long as he lived of the light, graceful figure, dressed in the most correct clothes, unafraid, and gay, as for a moment she looked to him from above the upthrown head of the horse. He groaned, for he thought he would never see her look like that again. In that terrible moment he knew how empty the world could be, and when he opened his eyes again he expected to see this desolation before him forever.

Then, wonder of wonders! The outlaw stood perfectly still for a moment, and in that space of time, Geraldine's life was on the knees of the gods. His beautiful head was held aloft, he seemed to be listening or seeing something far away with his wild, mournful eyes; the girl spoke to him lightly, confidentially, and he trotted easily away, delicate neck arched, nostrils breathing the scents of long distances. The girl on his back swayed lightly to the motion; once she looked back and smiled, waving her hand.

As Geraldine touched the saddle, Little Britches sprang nimbly away to safety. She, too, expected anything to happen but what had really come to pass. Her whole being had been so wrapped in the horror

and joy of revenge that she did not hear Billie's voice or know of his presence until he drew rein beside her. Then she looked up and saw a face from which the likeness she had known was gone.

They measured each other for a long moment; precious time snatched from the impending tragedy of which they were a part.

"Why?" he asked.

Then he realized that he was looking in the eyes of a stranger, some one who wore the image of the child he had known but whose soul was cruel and distorted, torn by bitter jealousy and hatred.

She was the first to turn away, but she moved with none of her old gay impudence. Her slim shoulders drooped; her face was drawn into old lines. She caught the roan's rein and threw herself into the saddle. Without a word she turned into the trail that lead to the Weed Patch.

But Billie was not there to see. Geraldine and the outlaw horse, moving swiftly across the open range, grew small in a moment, so it seemed; the stallion had remarkable speed when he chose to use it, but it was impossible to predict how long this amiable spell would last. Once or twice it had happened before; I B Dam had been successfully ridden, not through conquering but because he chose to have it so; possibly to betray other men into trust. By a freak of chance this was one of the times and there was still a chance that Geraldine might escape the fate which had seemed a certainty.

When he saw that she was safe for the moment, cool reason begun to assert itself and Billie made his plans quickly. The new horse had been ridden hard that day and could not be expected to overtake I B Dam. He turned to the corral where Widow Green sulked in isolation and quickly shifted his outfit to her. The necessity of using her to overtake the outlaw was an unfortunate one; the Widow could be trusted to create trouble where none existed at any time, but it was the best he could do. She was the only horse whose speed could be depended on to overtake the other.

Mrs. Moffatt stood in the kitchen door

when he passed; she looked pale and nervous.

"Are you going after Miss Geraldine?" she called anxiously. "I begged her not to ride that strange horse until you came back, but she would not listen."

"I'll bring her back," Billie promised grimly. He could have learned something of Little Britches' treachery from this source, but he did not want to hear it then. There must come a time when he would hear it from her own lips.

The queer thing was that he had no active curiosity concerning that phase of the affair. The only thing that mattered was separating Geraldine from that demon horse which at any moment might take it into his head to put an end to her. As the brown earth rolled away beneath his horse's feet he kept saying her name, "Geraldine, Geraldine"—the first time it had passed his lips.

CHAPTER XI.

"I B DAM."

THE Widow was fresh and ate up the trail. It was the north trail that led straight to the hills; plainly the girl had chosen that way in preference to any other; possibly to show them all that her will was law. She seemed to take pleasure in doing everything she had been advised against and Billie, plunging along, not daring to force the pace too rapidly but just keeping them well in sight, wondered where the thing would end.

He could see her ahead all the time, slim, graceful, a strange yet charming figure in her well cut riding clothes, sitting easily in her saddle as though she had no thought of danger coming near her. She was unconscious alike of his approach and of the peril at her side and all around her.

Suddenly the stallion swerved, turning half-way around and coming to an abrupt stop. He gave no more attention to the girl upon his back than if she had been thistledown. His head, lifted high, scented his herd a mile away; he was impatient merely with the binding saddle girths; the bridle that a moment ago had been a play-

thing was now the insignia of captivity. He would be rid of these things in a second,—when he had breathed his fill of the aroma that he loved.

Some instinct of her danger came to Geraldine; she looked around the empty plain, at the ground, suddenly so far beneath her, and felt the quiver of the silken, iron muscles that had brought her this far. Then she looked piteously behind and saw Billie, five hundred yards away.

It was the moment to be dreaded. Wearying of his trick, or perhaps having merely followed his own fancy, the stallion had suddenly remembered his freedom; that somewhere on the range not far away happy horses were roaming while he was chained in ignominy. He stood there like a beautiful statue, unconscious of the gentle urging of his rider; then with an almost human cry his forequarters lifted in the air, high, incredibly higher, reaching for some invisible goal.

"Jump!" shouted Billie Stranger. "Jump, girl!"

He did not wait this time. Widow Green tore over the distance that separated them, and as the stallion's forefeet left the earth, the rope from Billie's saddle horn circled and went singing out to meet its mark.

Geraldine proved that she could think quickly. Her look of surprise became understanding; at the instant the rope tightened around the stallion's forelegs she kicked her feet free from the stirrups and threw herself backward clear of the rolling, plunging creature that crashed to the ground with the tightening of the rope.

As his quick glance assured him of her safety, Billie flung himself from his horse and in a little while the struggle was ended. The saddle and bridle were on the ground and beautiful I B Dam was galloping away, free as the wind that sent his mane and tail, a wave of silky blackness, flaunting after him.

"What is it?" Geraldine Hoyt asked in a strained voice. "Why did you do that?"

"What made you ride that horse when I told you there wasn't one on th' range fit for you?" he demanded sternly.

She found her eyes drooping.

"Why—why—the little girl said—" and

stopped in distress, for she could not say more without bringing forward the name of one who, being absent, could not defend herself. A puzzled look crept over her beautiful face; she was bewildered, but she did not ask the questions that trembled on her lips.

"He'd have killed you by this time," Billie explained briefly, not trying to soften facts. "He's a man killer, a devil horse, and because he seemed gentle for twenty minutes was all the more reason he'd have raised hell when he did break loose. Excuse me for swearin', miss, but this is one of the occasions when a man has got to speak what is in his mind. That horse ain't fit to live. Some day I'm goin' to step out, an' when I come back there won't be no such animal on this range."

She studied his face and what she saw there paled her own. She knew that he spoke the truth and that she had been in the greatest peril, but this did not dull her innate spirit of fair play.

"Don't do that," she said earnestly. A slow bright flush came up in her cheeks but she went on bravely. "You have no right to kill him because he wants to be free—there are a thousand spirits that can be curbed and broken and because his cannot, it is unfair that he should die for it. You, least of all men, should do this, because—there is something in that horse that is like you—you couldn't be broken to other men's rule—"

They were standing facing each other when she said this and their eyes met. Then they looked away from each other and begun to walk back along the trail toward the ranch house, the gray horse picking her way daintily, following her master.

"It's funny you noticed that," said Billie after a while, "I couldn't explain it just like you have, but it must be that is what keeps me from doin' for that horse. I got no use for him; I hate him like mortal sin, but I can't help but see his point of view someway. There's somethin' he likes better than a warm barn and a bucket of oats and he's ready to give up all salvation to get it. Freedom can be that much to a man why not to a horse?"

"Why do you hate him then?" asked Geraldine softly. She did not hate I B Dam; she found it hard to remember that he wanted to kill her, for she could still feel his warm, bounding shoulders between her knees. As she waited for his answer she saw a queer, hard look spring to his eyes and his lips grow thin and cruel.

"Because I hate double-dealin'." he said morosely, "If he played his hand from th' start, if he came out and announced himself as a killer and put up his fight and killed or got licked—but he hits in the dark. That's what I hate ol' I B Dam for."

They were both thinking of the other hand that had struck in the dark; Geraldine remembered how Little Britches had come to her with a proposal that they ride out together. She had brought the horse and nothing had been said of his evil ways. The range girl seemed to take for granted that Geraldine could ride as well as herself and she might have hesitated to blame her now but that she had disappeared, making no effort to follow. She, Geraldine, had been abandoned to her fate as truly as though some weapon of destruction were used. The Desmond girl meant for her to die.

She stole another look at the grim face beside her. She had always seen him smiling, gravely or shyly embarrassed by her presence; the look he wore now was new and strange and made him seem years older. She tried to recall a word that Little Britches had spoken which might connect him with her subtle plan, but there was nothing. The girl had asked no questions, had seemed interested merely in the commonplaces of their brief acquaintance.

Why should Little Britches wish her harm? She dared not ask Billie though he must know. Somewhere back of all this was a mystery, probably a simple one; she could not connect these primitive people with subtleties or undercurrents. Presently she would know. When she met the girl again a few discreet questions would put it all before her.

Many times before the two reached the ranch house it was on her lips to ask Billie Stranger what it all meant, but always the question was unspoken. There was some-

thing about him that held her at a distance, her natural curiosity and the pique of being kept in the dark about a thing that so vitally concerned herself. He must know the cause of Little Britches' enmity; but when the end of the long walk came in sight she was no nearer a solution of the mystery, which after all was only a part of other mysteries which pressed upon her from every side.

She was wearied of asking herself why everything was so different from what she had been led to expect. Her uncle's absence unexplained, the condition of the ranch, which to her inexperienced eyes seemed ruin and destitution, and last, the vague but crushing certainty that underneath everything was an explanation which she instinctively shrunk from hearing.

Mrs Moffat met them thankfully.

"I knew something would happen," she cried tearfully when she saw Geraldine walking, "When will you listen to older people's advice, Miss Geraldine?"

The girl smiled ruefully.

"Nothing happened, Moffatt. Don't worry over me when you have that stove to make you shed tears." She looked at Billie wistfully as he started to move away, "I suppose I shall never ride now," she said.

That made him remember the new horse which he had forgotten until now, and he answered her smile in something like the old shy way.

"You can ride any time, day or night," he said, and told her about the sorrel mare that was to be her own. She was as delighted as a child and insisted on going to the corral at once to be shown her new possession.

Billie was closer to her than he had ever been at that moment. She fed the sorrel handful of alfalfa, snatched from the sheds in passing, and her pleasure was as keen and unmeasured as though her heart had been as simple as his own. The barrier between them seemed to fall away invisibly yet in no respect was one changed from what they had been the day before. Their souls were like two distant entities, starting across illimitable space; searching through unknown ways with blind eyes, yet

always drawn nearer and nearer to each other without knowing the forces that impelled them.

"May I ride with you some day?" she asked.

It was coming true. He managed to answer without betraying the tumult in his heart.

"I'd admire to take you along any time, miss. These trails ain't any too safe until you get to know them. Maybe tomorrow, if you feel like ridin'."

He went to the bunk-house, where Jack's cynical reproaches awaited him without seeing the one or hearing the other. She was going to ride with him tomorrow. He had a fatuous hour before reason reasserted itself and he remembered that in the fascination of being completely happy he was near to forgetting his resolution to confide in Jack when the question was feminine. There was no twenty-one played that night, for before they turned into their bunks Jack had heard the whole story which had to do with matters fully as grave as the treachery of Little Britches.

He listened without interruption and when the story was finished smoked for a while in continued silence. Billie did not interrupt his thoughts for he knew that Jack would speak when the time came. But he was not prepared for the importance his friend put upon the outlaw horse episode.

"I always says," Jack begun, "that when you mix Mexican with blood this side of th' Border, you got a bad combination. What did I tell you about insultin' a female by givin' her a pretty an' then snatchin' it away? Britches has got her Mex blood up and th' unfortunate thing is that she's chose tuh settle on the young lady to pay her bet instead of you. She'll take a lot of payin' for she ain't through yet."

"I never thought Britches was a plumb fool," Billie argued, bewildered, "but this looks like it. All this fuss over a box of candy! You're wrong, Jack. It's somethin' else that's got her excited."

His friend gave him a queer look.

"All right, if you think so, but remember what I said. There's nothin' too small for a woman tuh see red about—usually little

things riles 'em th' most—like a horse shyin' at a piece of paper. Big things they don't seem tuh mind so much. They up an' climb right over, or lay down an' let themselves be rolled flat. No, wimmin don't raise hell about big things—that's what's got 'em their reputation for being hard tuh understand. I'll bet my last chip that candy box was more important to Britches than th' Peace Treaty. It would be tuh any woman I ever knowed."

But without possessing Jack's psychology, Billie found it hard to credit this theory. He shook his head rather sheepishly; it embarrassed him to imagine women arguing openly or otherwise about him or his doings. Women had never interested him much, but now it happened that there was one he wanted to think about and it seemed almost a sacrilege that another, even poor little Britches whom it was difficult to think of as a woman, should intrude upon that dream.

"You'll get cured of promis'cus love makin' some day," Jack warned.

Billie had enough of the subject.

"Shucks," he jeered, defensively, "who's been makin' love? You make me tired."

And then they fell to talking of other things—the second raid on the Circle O, and the mysterious brands on the new horse's shoulder.

"Won' ol' Camberwell be hot when he finds out about that horse trade," Jack chuckled, "Wow!"

CHAPTER XII.

GERALDINE ASKS QUESTIONS.

BUT as it happened Geraldine did not ride with Billie next day, for the reason that long before she opened her eyes to the morning cup of tea brought her by Mrs Moffat, he was miles away in company with Jim Cooper, the saturnine sheriff from Cat Fork who arrived with daybreak and as silently.

Their conversation was brief and unenlightening. Cooper explained that for the time he had dismissed his posse but he had business on the other side of the Pass. He

wondered if Billie wouldn't want to ride over that way with him, seeing it was rather lonesome riding alone.

To this Billie responded that he had been thinking of crossing the Pass himself some day when work was slack. There were some calves on the other side he had heard about and today would do as well as another for looking at them.

"Camberwell's calves?" inquired the sheriff, solemnly.

Before they started on their way they paid a visit to the corral where the new horse stood with her head over the fence, sniffing the early morning air. She was duly admired and examined and Cooper took a mental photograph of the brand on her shoulder.

"It's curious how careless a man'll get tuh be," he ruminated, as they rode along. "Now a horse marked up like that one is bound to excite folks' attention. No matter how clear a man's title is to her, there's sure tuh be some argument about it sooner or later. Seems like a careful owner would sell her down th' Border or further up north,—but no, old Camberwell's been livin' unmolested a long time in this region. Folks was too busy during the late unpleasantness to bother about him. He's sorta like an ostrich with his head in th' sand. He thinks th' world has plumb forgot him an' he's about due for a slap that'll wake him up."

The two rode off just as the sun was coming up and that was why Geraldine Hoyt waited with secret impatience to hear Billie's voice asking for her. It had been agreed that she was to try the new horse that morning and she could not fathom the insignificance of social customs upon the range.

She would not admit even to herself that she waited with impatience to hear from him, but she did acknowledge anger that an employe of her uncle should neglect her entertainment. She was snappish to Mrs Moffatt, and painfully frank in her disapproval of poor Jarrow's clothes. When she got a glimpse of Jack saddling the gloomy Tomato Can she stifled the voice of pride and joined him outside.

Jack knew nothing except that his friend

had gone away to look at some calves, but he must have been touched by her scarcely concealed disappointment for he offered to saddle the new horse and invited her to ride over to the south range with him and look at the white faces. No more marked condescension to the weaker sex could have been made than this by Jack, for he cherished a deep-rooted conviction that the further a woman kept from man's business the better the business progressed, and who shall say he was not correct, to a certain extent.

And to Geraldine's astonishment she found herself consenting as though she were the favored one. Privately she was gnashing her little teeth and swearing to pay Billie Stranger back for his neglect, but her heart and youth rejoiced in the opportunity to be free of the dull shack and in the prospect of a fresher companionship than the two old servants.

The new horse was a success and Geraldine almost forgot her anger in the joy of the rushing wind and the light even gallop that carried her against it. For the first time she saw something to admire in the strange country which in the beginning had been so stern and unwelcoming. She wondered timidly if, when Norman Hoyt returned and put the ranch in a civilized condition, she might not even be a little happy here. It was to be her home; the stern facts of her poverty were too evident to be overlooked or doubted; she had no choice but to remain—then why not make the best of it?

Jack was silent during the early part of the ride. Tomato Can resented the brisk pace of the new comer, and lagged sulkily behind; this delinquency being overlooked by his master in the pressure of more important thought.

It was mid October. The summer had lingered late and dry and the grazing was sparse and uncertain, although there still remained enough to carry their stock in comfort. The cattle straying into small cañons and coulées required careful watching for it was certain that when summer broke it would be in one of those swift climatic changes that always follow a prolonged drought. With only the two of

them to keep watch on their stock, it was necessary that Billie and Jack look carefully after their precious "white faces" who carried the fortunes of the Three Nines upon their broad, stupid backs.

So that today while Geraldine exclaimed over the beauty of the translucent day, Jack looked pessimistically at the smiling sky, as blue as it had been in June.

"It ain't goin' tuh keep up like this," he assured himself. "There's somethin' layin' back there a'waitin' tuh catch us off guard. It's wantin' tuh catch up them poor dogies and bury 'em under drifts that won't melt away until along next Spring. I know th' sort of all fired, hell freezin' blow that's comin', but it won't catch me nappin'."

His loyalty forbade any criticism of Billie's frequent defection. Whatever his friend did was right though he sighed over the manifest impossibility of keeping all their herd in sight.

Geraldine, too, had been thinking of other things than the loveliness of the day. It came upon her that this was an opportunity she must not miss of trying to solve some of the mysteries that puzzled her. Jack would have been amazed had he known that she looked upon him as a simple fellow who would unhesitatingly give a frank answer to any question put to him.

A week ago she would have asked no questions, and although it still seemed incredible that she should discuss a member of her family with anyone, a swift and radical change was taking place in Geraldine Hoyt. She was unconsciously finding her way to the firm ground of common sense where her new world was founded. Already her young mind was dropping beliefs in what had once been essentials.

As Jarrow put away his livery, so had he put away servitude and Geraldine no longer desired to claim his service. She would have been annoyed to find him standing behind her chair in boots and flannel shirt. Jarrow, once the proudest butler in his native country had fallen naturally into the position of handy man, and his young mistress would not have him changed.

She scarcely recognized the significance of this altered viewpoint; she only knew that the world had turned topsy-turvy.

"When is my uncle coming home?"

They were riding side by side, the new horse losing spirit before the determined opposition of Tomato Can, had fallen into the running walk of the steady traveller. Jack taken unawares by the question, stammered in embarrassment. He who had so constantly advised making a clean breast of the situation now lied desperately.

"Why, miss, I figured Billie explained all about your uncle. Leastways he told me he did—"

"He told me my uncle was in Arizona," Geraldine said remorselessly. "But I don't believe either of you have been entirely frank with me. He should be here attending to his own affairs instead of leaving the ranch to strangers. No wonder it is a ruin. Please don't think I am finding fault with your work—" she hastened to add this small sop when she saw the blank bewilderment of his face, "I'm sure you are both doing all you can to make it a success—or at least you are. But there is a great deal to be looked after—especially when your—your—friend is always away. If I knew where my uncle was, I would send for him."

This speech was unpremeditated by Geraldine and sprung unrehearsed from her lips. It had its root in a little hurt feeling that persisted since she learned of Billie's defection that morning. It relieved her somewhat to openly find fault with him. She did not see the flicker of a grim smile on Jack's lips.

"Now that's real kind of you to talk thataway. It sure is fine of you to take an interest. But I wouldn't send after Mister Hoyt if I was you—I really wouldn't. There ain't any knowin' how mad it might make him tuh be called away sudden-like from his business. He knows me and Billie can manage—"

"But it is you who does all the managing," she insisted, impatiently. "He is always gone—always in town, or riding about with that queer girl who brought the horse yesterday. She told me they were often together."

Jack looked interested and surprised as though he had heard a bit of pleasant gossip.

"You don't say! Now I never heard tell of Little Britches lyin' about anything—except when she says ol' I B Dam was a fit horse for a lady tuh ride. If she says she an' Billie pow wows together, then I reckon so they do. But hereabouts we don't look on Britches much as a gal—she's more like a hard ridin' hand, helpin' tuh string fence or ride herd whenever she's asked tuh help out. But there ain't no tellin' about her an' Billie. I don't predict nothin' about females."

Jack was chuckling inwardly at the ease with which he had steered the conversation away from the dangerous topic of Norman Hoyt; he did not suspect that Geraldine's interest in her uncle was partly feigned, or that she had the conversation exactly where she wanted it.

"Why do you suppose she wanted me to ride that dangerous horse?" she said in a low, earnest tone. "If she knows all about such things, she surely realizes that I might have been killed."

This was a poser for Jack; a more difficult question to answer than her first had been. He could have told her easily enough why Little Britches wished her to ride the outlaw, but the telling might involve dangerous and delicate points. Jack knew enough of women to know that Geraldine might not grasp the subtleties which were behind the other girl's action, and as this would entail some difficult explaining he resolved to say nothing at all.

"Tell you what, Miss Geraldine, I reckon it was because she knowed you could ride him, an' you did, didn't you? You rode him for all of three miles, an' there's many a bronco buster in these parts would give a purty something tuh be able tuh brag about doin' that much. Yessir you sure did ride that horse, an' I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do. It was in my mind when I asked you to come along to-day. I'm goin' to show you how tuh rope. In two weeks you'll be droppin' a rope over anything that takes your fancy on this range. Britches or nobody else won't have nothin' on you."

"Oh, will you?" she murmured, raising eager eyes to his. "You mean lassoing, don't you? It was the lasso that saved me yesterday."

"I mean just that," Jack agreed dryly. "But in these parts you speak of 'ropin'—You'll be understood better."

She accepted the correction sweetly; she was too eager for her first lesson to be annoyed. Jack, painstakingly guiding her hands through the first simple maneuvers, knew the doubtful satisfaction that follows immolation on the altar of friendship. He might have been peacefully pursuing his natural way, building air castles about the white faces or any of the hundred and one curious entertainments of his solitude, yet here he was, teaching a fool girl, pretty and sweet though she was, to throw a rope, which common sense warned she would never do; and telling lies, lies by the dozen, to protect Billie who had heartlessly departed and left him to face responsibilities that were no part of his position on the ranch.

"I otta quit," he reflected bitterly, as he patiently coiled the rope for the seventh time. "I otta roll up my old saddle an' drift. Whadda I hang around an' do th' dirty work for, while my partner gallivants I'd like tuh know? This is too much—me, Jack Baker, turned into a kindergarten teacher of ropin'. Let him come home—just let him. Me an' Tomater Can, we'll be hittin' th' trail for some parts where a man ain't a darn slave."

But Billie Stranger was neither neglecting his work or indifferent to Geraldine's claims. He accompanied Cooper on the proposed journey with grave readiness but would much rather have been riding beside Geraldine than any place in the world.

He was not the man to put his own desires before duty, and he knew that the most important thing now was to find the men who were behind the systematic crimes of the past few weeks. Until this was done it was of little use to go about ordinary occupations; the menace might break out anywhere. He knew this and Cooper, the grim sheriff from Cat Fork knew it as well—the wire-cutters, the traitor who told them where to strike, and the murderer of Milt Holley must all be discovered before the valley would be a white man's country.

The minds of both men were filled with speculation that had to do with this visit to

the other side of Fiddleback, but until they came to Raining Rock Pass nothing was said by either that bore in the remotest degree upon the business in hand.

When they came to the mouth of the pass they drew rein and contemplated its narrow length in silence.

The entrance had none of the features which had given to the pass its evil name. It was a wide plateau capacious enough to receive several horses abreast but very soon the way narrowed so that travellers must advance singly or in pairs. It was a gloomy place, cavernous and empty of sound except for the faint drip of the falling shale that punctuated the silence with a soft musical monotony.

The floor, slightly shelving, led to a fissure along the shale face which took care of the waste that came from above, but for this as the years went by, the pass would have been filled and become a part of the mountain itself. There must have been some huge subterranean chamber underneath to care for all this waste or perhaps a hidden river whose waters washed it away. And this theory was borne out by the hollow, reverberating sound that followed the sound of a horse's iron shod hoof upon the floor.

The pass was not dark, for on either side its boundaries fell away so abruptly that at noon the sun found its way there in a faint thread for a minute or two. Midway there was a sudden turn that left both entrances concealed from each other and it was beyond this bend that the shale fell thickest and where the pass was at its narrowest dimensions. But in spite of the light that made no mystery of its length even at its narrowest point, there was a sinister aspect to the place which made itself felt from the moment of entrance.

"That old pile of gravel has laid there a long time," said Billie looking at the face of shale. "Maybe she might stand a lot of jarrin' yet before she'd fall all at once."

"Maybe," Cooper agreed. "Looks sorta that way tuh me. If somethin started it from comin' from on top, now, I won't say the whole blame works wouldn't come at once, but it'd take more'n a bunch of horses or cows passin' through to bring it down."

"Specially if they went slow an' careful an' didn't hurry none," Billie finished.

They begun to advance, Cooper in the lead and when they had gone forward a few yards Billie spoke again.

"Every dogie that's gone off the valley range could have been sneaked through here as well as not—We've been right accommodatin' it strikes me, swallerin' that story about th' pass cavin' in so easy. It's never stopped Camberwell's men visitin' our side whenever they please, that I can see."

"That's so. Maybe they'll take it sort of neighborly if we stop in to-day."

They were in the turn of the pass and Cooper's horse, stumbling over a hole, brought a small shower of fine shale upon them. The face of the mountain turned a sharp angle here, as though it had been drawn with a rule. It was at this point that danger lay and the men, in spite of their reassurance, hastened to leave the place behind them.

The way was much narrower than it had been and it was with relief that they approached the end of the sinister pass and paused to look over the strange country spread before their eyes.

It was a valley like their own, but not so pleasant or open. It was like a face that hides its thought behind ugly furrows and secret places and whose true meaning is for no man to read. There was grazing land, broken patches of brownish green where a stray animal might be glimpsed here and there, but there was far more sagebrush and scrub timber breaking into bare, unfriendly hills.

A hundred cattle might be hidden here where one would be discovered; to hunt them from unknown coulees and round them up for inspection was a task no man might envy.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAMBERWELL'S.

CAMBERWELL'S ranch house lay close to the hills. It was a long gray building with cold windows guarding its approach and inhospitable doors always closed with heavy bars. It was the abode

of men who had no gentle qualities and no wish for softness or beauty. Its atmosphere was the atmosphere of its own valley, barren and hard and secretive.

Stories about this place drifted into other valleys and to the little towns scattered through the region. It was said that at Camberwell's the ordinary regime of ranch life was ignored; his men were not cowmen of the ranges, but drifters who appeared from unknown parts and departed as they came. So that you could hold a stiff lip, carry your liquor well, ride like a fiend and shoot as well, you were welcome at Camberwell's for as long as you chose to stay.

When the draft board wanted men there were none to be found at Camberwell's but those long past the age, though this lack never interfered with Camberwell's payroll, or the crowd that gathered at the ranch when night covered their approach.

It was known that Camberwell harbored slackers but no one took the matter in hand or saw that he must pay as other men paid. He had come to be a privileged character, not through fear but through the certainty that in the end his devilish ingenuity would outwit his accuser and the case against him prove a boomerang. In the sparsely settled district during the term of the war, men had been too busy with their own affairs to think of his, and since then the readjustment had left him to his own ways, for the time, at least.

But Jim Cooper had replaced the easy going officer who should have looked into these things but did not, and he, Cooper, was not satisfied with things as he found them. He was slowly gathering around him a group which had no fear of boomerangs and whose ingenuity and daring was of the same character as the man they sought. The visit of Cooper and Billie Stranger to Camberwell's valley was the first move in a series that would bare the secrets of that long gray house and render an account of long standing to a debtor who ignored it.

They met no one on their ride through the desolate valley. It was like a land without life; a pulseless region asleep in the light of day, but harboring behind its silence a threat to waken to some insidious call

unheard by the strangers who invaded its solitude.

When they drew rein before Camberwell's house there was still no one in sight. The cold windows told them nothing; they pierced the wall above a man's head and it was not easy to come near enough for a glance within. They were small windows with narrow panes clouded with dirt. Anything might have waited behind them except the virtues we are taught to look for in a man's home. But if the place were bare and unfriendly, it possessed a strange element of neatness and order, if one may except the condition of the window panes. There were no tin cans around this doorway; no litter of untidiness anywhere. The fences were in good condition, strong and well made. Whatever household offices the place possessed were at the back, hidden from sight.

The smash and clatter of Widow Green's restless feet brought no curious heads to the door which was barred as usual, but the smoke curling from two chimneys and a glimpse of saddled horses beyond the high corral fence proved that the place was not so deserted as it seemed.

The two men dismounted without hesitation; they knew that Camberwell never parleyed from his doorstep. To speak with him you must place yourself in the ring he drew about himself, robbed of all advantage.

They knew that they were being watched; it was impossible that their arrival could have passed unnoticed, but they secured their horses with easy nonchalance and knocked for admittance with no hint of this suspicion about them. It was characteristic of Camberwell's that no visitor took the liberty of riding into his premises without being passed upon and admitted through the front door. There was no casual way to his acquaintance.

It was a long minute before the door was opened and a Chinaman stood grinning vacantly on the threshold. "The Celestial was alibi for the watchers, whoever they were, for his floury arms gave evidence of his recent occupation in the kitchen and his welcome was warm, if delayed.

It was not difficult to gain entrance to

Camberwell's if approached in this manner. There was a suspicious ease about it that warned the wary of further difficulties beyond. Like other visitors they found themselves in a long, low room with a huge fireplace where burning wood smouldered in spite of the warmth of the day.

The room was a cheerful one and in striking contrast to the outer appearance of the house, so that it had the effect of reassuring those who entered for the first time. Bright Indian rugs lay about the floor, and in the furnishings there was a note of rugged comfort and what was even elegance, for the chairs and tables were of massive oak and had been brought there with trouble and expense. There were no bunks; Camberwell house had bedrooms for its guests, and the men had their own quarters.

The Chinaman with suave courtesy brought them into this place and offered to find his master; it was only a couple of minutes until they heard someone approaching across the passage that separated this room from another.

Billie stood up when Camberwell entered. He fingered his hat nervously.

"I didn't come over here tuh bother you," he begun to explain awkwardly. "I just happened to run into th' Sheriff here an' I guess his business is so much more important than mine that I better wait until another time, so if you'll excuse me—"

Camberwell returned a long look to this ingenuous speech, and it would have been impossible to translate his thoughts through the medium of his expression. He waited for Billie to finish his halting phrase and when he did not, answered easily.

"There is time for everything. Perhaps I had better hear your matter first."

He sent a tentative glance toward Cooper, who had said nothing, and for a second the eyes of the men clashed; then the spark vanished and there was no sign of hostility about either of them. Camberwell's manner, as he turned back to Billie, was attentive and serious, as though he recognized no greater call upon him than the affairs of an embarrassed cowboy who stammered out his trivial request.

He was a man of fifty, tall, weather beaten, with eyes as cold and expressionless as the windows of his house, and a mouth that betrayed the weaknesses and vice of an undisciplined, cruel nature. He had the physique of a man half his age and the gray haired, hoary wisdom of twice as many years, each of them lived in sin and selfishness. He measured the younger man with hard scrutiny, but, whatever he thought, there was no sign upon his face to show what it was. In the end he pushed forward a comfortable chair and made other hospitable overtures which were those a host offers a guest, self invited or otherwise.

Billie accepted the chair with a smile that carried out the role he had elected to play.

"I was wantin' to speak with you about one of your riders," he said, "fella I traded horses with over in Cat Fork yesterday." There was the faintest change in Camberwell's expression, a quickening of the carefully guarded expression of casual interest, but in a moment it was gone. Billie kept on as though he had seen nothing. "I don't know his name. I couldn't make that Chink understand not to bother you."

"Did you bring the horse with you?" Camberwell asked.

Billie smiled ingenuously.

"I should say not. What I wanted was tuh trade for another one. I got a lot of good stock on my ranch, but my partner and me are rather short handed. We got no time to break in any of our broncos no matter how good they are, an' we need some trained ponies. Winter's comin' on and our stock's scattered all over the range. We've got no more'n two broncos that'll work with cows."

"You are—" Camberwell said.

"Billie Stranger of the Three Nines."

Camberwell looked him over with a new interest. If his question had been superfluous, his manner did not suggest it. His expression betrayed nothing more than a faint recognition of the name.

"I have heard of you," he said. "You are the man who won a ranch on a very ordinary poker hand and plenty of nerve.

I am glad to meet you. Nerve is plentiful in this country and poker is universal. When the two are combined they are noteworthy. Several of the men are about the place, I believe. Presently we will go out and see what they have in the corral."

He turned to Cooper with a change in his manner which slight as it was, did not pass unmarked by the other two.

"Is your business with me of a confidential nature, Mr. Cooper?"

The sheriff of Cat Fork changed his tobacco from left to right. He was calm and unperturbed; if there was an advantage he possessed it.

"I don't know as it is, Mr. Camberwell," he returned with deliberation. "Billie Stranger here, is one of us. He stands to lose the same as every body else if this country isn't cleaned up an' made safe for honest men to live in. I reckon he's interested in th' subject of cattle rustlin' same as Charley Patten of th' Circle O, for instance."

If he expected to see Camberwell betray himself by a startled movement he was disappointed. Instead, the ranchman said dryly:

"Naturally. Every man who breeds cattle hates a rustler as a matter of course. I heard that Patten has lost some stock. Have you traced them to this side?"

Cooper was not prepared for this cool move but he kept his guard.

"No," he replied, "I wouldn't hardly look for 'em over here. They couldn't be brought over th' mountains that I can see. But the rustlers themselves could get through the Pass easy enough. I wanted to ask you if you know of a man whose shootin' hand has been put out of workin' order with a bullet, a week or two ago?"

Camberwell shook his head.

"You mean the fellow who did the shooting at Cat Fork? I know nothing about him, of course. If I did you wouldn't have to come here and ask me. Everybody has heard about that affair and the man who did it." He gave Billie a glance of cold raillery—"The man you're looking for has had time to get down into Mexico."

"Or up to the Dominion," Cooper added dryly. "I wonder why hunted men are

always wished off on Mexico when there's lots of likelier places to get to? Well, maybe so." He got up to join Billie, who was already standing. "You lost any cattle yourself?"

"My foreman has not reported any losses."

"Then you're lucky. I noticed ridin' over that your stock was considerable scattered. You might lose a nice bunch an' never know it."

"That's right," Camberwell agreed, and then shook his head. "We've never been troubled with rustlers over this side. It may be too hard to bunch the cattle on this rough range and my men are on the job all the time. Nobody can get very near without their knowledge. I don't believe it's worth your time to look about over here too much."

If there was a covert threat in his tone it was gone before it could be clearly recognized. The next moment there was nothing but hospitality in his invitation to stop for dinner so that Billie could see some of the men and probably make a satisfactory bargain in horseflesh.

On the way to the corral Camberwell led his guests through an empty passage with a deep sunken door on either side. This passage opened directly upon a wide veranda at the back, latticed and fairly well covered with growing vines. Whatever his reason for introducing strangers to a glimpse of the intimate family life of the ranch house, it was marked with a certain cold defiance of their opinion that was a part of the man's character.

The veranda was a pleasant place with rugs and wicker chairs scattered about. A young Mexican boy dressed in the fanciful garb of his country sat on the railing twanging a small mandolin and a woman was seated in a low chair near by. There was another chair close beside her and its rockers were swaying as though it had been hastily vacated. As the three men stepped from the door the woman sprung up, startled.

She was young and rather gayly dressed and she was beautiful in a hard, bright way. She was frightened, too, and her eyes sought Camberwell's in an entreating way.

He passed her with a slight nod, explaining, "My housekeeper, Mrs. Atwood," and the two men returned her wide-eyed look with embarrassed nods.

If Camberwell had with sardonic humor, planned this surprise for them the result was all he could have expected. They were confused and shaken from the sense of security they had gained from the interview. It was like flaunting a red flag of defiance in their faces. He meant to show them that he had no fear of their investigation or surmise.

A half dozen men were idling around the big corral, some of them speaking together in low voices, others alone in aloof silence. There was a complete absence of the half childish, rude frolicking of their kind; nobody was bragging, nobody shooting craps. Camberwell's men were unnaturally well behaved; they were like men under vigilant command, waiting for their orders; too intent upon their business for relaxation, each with his life a separate, secret thing.

Billie sensed this as soon as he came among them, but his poise was as secure as their own, and he gave no hint of his knowledge that every eye watched him in secret. He was not deceived by Camberwell's hospitable overtures or by the frankness that had characterized his reception so far. Other men had had all that and come away no wiser. He might mix with these men, eat and sleep beside them, yet return knowing no more than when he came.

He knew that Cooper's thoughts were along the same lines yet there was nothing they could do to force the issue. Knowledge depended solely upon chance, and so far their visit had brought them nothing. Unless luck played into their hands they would have to ride away presently, counting this trip as another failure.

He strolled over to the corral and looked the horses over with a critical eye. There were some good ones there and they did not look like range stock either. They were big, long limbed fellows with rangey bodies and thoroughbred heads. Some of them bore no brands at all. Such horses might have been found on the stock farms of Western Canada where hunters of superfine blood are bred by Englishmen who

have tried to transplant the customs of the old country to the new.

Some secret sign must have passed from Camberwell to his men, for after the first evident show of resentment and suspicion they joined the stranger willingly enough and fell naturally into horse talk. Milling around with the others Billie saw the horse he had traded away in Cat Fork and his recognition of it brought a grim laugh from one of his new acquaintances.

"You trimmed Armstrong all right," he said. "That mare you rode home was one of the best. He turned that brute of yours in when he got home and I wouldn't advise you to talk trade when you see him again."

"Shucks," Billie deprecated. "That horse is the spryest on the Three Nines."

"I hear you have a spryer one," somebody else said. "A stallion you call by some cuss word. Want to trade him?"

I B Dam! The horse that might have killed Geraldine yesterday! Here was something—a thread, too fine, too tangled, to be seen but connected somewhere with the deeper secret—but he could not follow it. What did these men know of the outlaw, and what was the meaning behind their laughter?

"I sure have," he agreed heartily. "A horse I wouldn't ask any man to ride unless he had his life insured an' was honin' tuh die anyway. Worst thing about that horse is he's liable tuh disappoint you after you made your arrangements. Just when you think your time's come he'll trot off like a buggy horse an' whine for sugar at every rise. But then, I reckon you've heard of him yourself?"

"I heard a lady rode him once," said one of the men.

How did they know that? There had been no witnesses to that scene except Little Britches, unless some of Camberwell's men were within view and had remained discreetly hidden. He was convinced that this supposition was correct when he saw the confusion of the man who had spoken, and noted that he relapsed into silence after his revealing remark.

While Cooper talked upon non essential subjects to Camberwell, Billie chatted

away with I B Dam as his theme but no one took up the gauntlet. The men became friendlier in their manner to him; it was difficult to resist Billie Stranger's infectious smile. Camberwell excused himself and went into the house, and the woman left the veranda, though the Mexican boy still twanged his whiningly sweet mandolin from the railing where the vines concealed him except for glimpses of his scarlet serape here and there through the leaves.

Presently the Chinese cook came to the door and called dinner. This was served in a long low room semidetached from the kitchen, and the men begun to move toward it in a body. A fleeting look passed between Billie and Cooper. They both knew that when the meal was over they would have no legitimate excuse for further lingering. There were no horses for trade and Camberwell knew it when he introduced them to his men. It was only another phase of his sardonic defiance. Billie's offers even when made in the ratio of two to one were rejected flatly and if they were to return to Camberwell's they must find another excuse and a better one.

The man's boldness was not overrated. He had lived in security, holding his own through sheer coolness and incredible daring for so long that he was now confident to the verge of recklessness. It would take boldness as complete and ruthless as his own to convict him of any wrong doing and this would demand the aid of luck as well.

Concealing his chagrin behind a smile, Billie was moving toward the dining room with the others when a horseman in charge of a string of horses appeared in the narrow runway that led to the mountain pasture. His approach had been shielded by the outbuildings and he was among them without warning.

Of the group, intent upon their meal, Billie was the only one who vouchsafed the newcomer a glance of interest. And Billie needed all his reserve to guard the surprise that nearly betrayed him. For the foremost horse in the string was a familiar figure to him. It was the roan bronco, Dude, inseparable from Little Britches. What was her horse doing here?

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



The Big Feller

by William Merriam Rouse

AS the night wore on toward its climax the Runt grew more fearful that his own blood might darken the floor of Pete Lamere's barber shop. It was always like that. Whenever he and the Big Feller pulled off anything his nerve got stringy just before the moment of success, of blows, of panting action. He was used to it, and he made himself stick. For of all possible things between heaven and hell, he most desired to be like the Big Feller.

If more than two aces showed up out of the deck when the Big Feller pulled his simple stunt, there would be trouble. It was time for him to do it now—a very fat jackpot. They were using matches for chips, and the pile in the center of the table looked like a double handful of jackstraws. Pete Lamere, the banker, had a shoe box full of dirty money—mostly fives and tens—at his elbow. His shop, headquarters for the sports of Twin Ponds, had been closed since eleven o'clock the night before, and for five hours he had been sitting in the curtained, airtight room with the bank growing.

There was Joe Tyler, the burly liveryman, with a face now as red as the plaid of his waistcoat, looming through the tobacco smoke. The Runt, whose complete name was Calvin Todd, figured that Tyler would be a bad man in a fight. He knew that the other two Twin Ponders, Murphy and Pierce, would be bad men—they were river drivers, and they had on their spiked

boots. Lamere might or might not carry a knife. Anyhow, Todd had seen him bounce an objectionable rummy from the shop, and knew that he could handle himself.

Four of the enemy, if it came to a showdown. But Jake Anderson, the Big Feller, sat there as cool as a cucumber; roaring his bets from under a cascading mustache such as the Runt could never hope to raise. Jake, nevertheless, had one eye on the door and the other on the bank as the pot got to the point of slushing over. His mighty fist plowed across the table and spilled a handful of matches.

"Call!" he rumbled.

Everybody had stayed in, and there were some good hands, but nothing like the hand held by the Big Feller. He fanned out four aces and a deuce upon the table, pushing his chair back a little as he did so. The only trouble with his cards was that there was an odd ace in the hand of the liveryman. Just for an instant nobody said anything. Pete Lamere grew rigid, and his black eyes fastened themselves upon the face of Anderson. The river drivers leaned forward with that little hint of a movement which is preliminary to action. Joe Tyler, with popping eyes, sat comparing the two hands. The Big Feller seized that moment and made it his own.

"They's something crooked here!" he thundered, leaping up with an apparently accidental kick which sent his chair out of the way. "Who dealt them cards?"

"I guess, me, dat you know more as anybody what's crooked!" replied Lamere.

Jake Anderson wasted no time. With a single movement of his big right paw he lifted the hanging lamp out of its frame and sent it smashing through a window, sash, glass, and curtain. In the half-second during which the lamp was a flaring arc in mid air, Cal Todd saw the left hand of his partner reach toward Pete Lamere.

While the Runt jumped for the corner that he had picked out beforehand, he knew exactly what was happening in the darkness. Lamere's hands had grasped the box of money. They would involuntarily lift to defend his eyes against the clutching fingers of Jake's left hand. Then Jake would snatch the shoe-box of bills. This much the Runt would have bet his life on; and he felt reasonably certain of the final result.

He crouched in his corner, with his hands ready in case the battle came his way; but the grunting, cursing heart of the struggle surged away from him and in the direction of the door. Out of the medley came a sudden rending of wood and a choked cry that meant serious harm to somebody. The uproar died as quickly as it had begun. The Runt shuddered, but he kept a cat-like gaze upon the blackness in front of him, and at the first flare of a match he leaped forward with clenched fists and labored breath to play his part of innocence. Lamere was lighting a bracket lamp that had not been in use.

Murphy lay upon the wreck of a chair, with his head gashed from eyebrow to crown. The mouth of the barber was a smear. Joe Tyler was just laboring up to his hands and knees, with groans, when Pierce pushed back the door, that now hung upon one hinge, and stepped into the room. He stooped and picked up something from the floor.

"Got away—but he dropped a ten-spot, anyway, the son of a—!" he growled. Then he saw Murphy, and knelt beside him.

"Is he hurt bad?" whispered Todd.

"Nope!" The riverman shrugged. "But it's a mighty good thing his head is thick or it 'd be under the daisies for him! That was a whale of a wallop he got!"

"You, Todd! You know where dat big Jake Anderson come from?" asked Lamere, as he brought a basin of water and a towel for Murphy. "You was the one asked for him to play poker wit' us."

"Sure I do!" exploded the Runt, with an oath. And then he lied emphatically. "He lives over the lake in Vermont. I seen him in Vergennes—the crook!"

"Me, I go dere some time, maybe," said Lamere.

"You ain't the only one!" gasped Tyler, with hands still caressing his stomach. "If anybody can locate him I'll get the boys together and furnish horses to drive to hell and back after him!"

"Me too!" Todd shook his fist at the gray morning into which the Big Feller had vanished. "I didn't lose as much as some of you fellers, but I'm a dam' sight madder for it was me that got him into the game!"

"Ye-ah," agreed Lamere, speculatively. "You got him into dis game."

At which point in the conversation the Runt became very busy helping to bring Murphy back to the world of jackpots and fights, for he did not want the thought of that gathering to turn upon him. He did not want them to remember that he himself had been in Twin Ponds but six weeks, and only for half of that time a member of the select gathering that played for high stakes in the barber shop. He was glad when Joe Tyler said he was going home and to bed to forget that somebody had kicked him in the stomach—he was still more pleased when Murphy came to and he himself felt free to breathe the fresh air, alone.

Again the Runt had come through with a whole skin—but he believed it was the Big Feller's luck and not his own that turned the trick. He flagged the sleeper that went through Twin Ponds at daylight, rode south four stations, and took the next train north. That afternoon he landed in Amesville, a hundred miles north of Twin Ponds. He shook hands around and asked if anybody knew where he could get a job, just as he always did when he got home. He knew they knew that he didn't mean it.

The next day the Big Feller appeared, with a black eye and a lilt of the shoulders that defied anybody to speak about it. He

found the Runt just as Todd had settled himself on the grass back of the Methodist church horse shed with a can of corn and a bag of crackers. In silence Anderson took the can and rimmed the top out with the blade of an enormous jack-knife. Half the crackers and most of the corn disappeared before it was his pleasure to talk. He thrust his knife into the sod to clean it, and then cut a chew from his plug.

"Well, Runt," he said, "they was four hundred and seventy-eight dollars in that box. Leastways they was that much when I got time to count it."

The Runt would have given a decade from the other end of his life, precious as that life in its entirety was to him, if he could have played the Big Feller's part, and in the way that the Big Feller played it.

"I told 'em you lived in Vergennes," said Todd. "That Lamere, he acted like he might want to get even."

"Ye-ah," agreed Anderson. "They's plenty of folks would like to get even with me."

He made the statement carelessly, as a god might speak of the curses of mortals. That was the way Calvin Todd wanted to feel; but he was always remembering that he weighed only a hundred and thirty pounds, that he could not bull through a crowd of huskies on his size, in short that he was not the Big Feller.

Jake now drew from a waistcoat pocket some folded bills. They made a little packet of moderate size, very moderate size. He handed it to Todd.

"A hundred," he said. "Your share."

The Runt gulped in astonishment. His expectations had been modest—but he was out six weeks' expenses as well as what he had lost on the night of the big pot.

"Ain't that pretty low, Big Feller?" he asked. "You see—"

"Low?" Anderson turned his broad face and inundated him with a flood of scorn. "Did you take any chances? What the hell did you do, anyway? Hey?"

"I hung around Twin Ponds and found out where they was real money, and got you into the game, and—"

"Rats!" The Big Feller annihilated a

grasshopper with an accurate stream of tobacco juice. "All you done was help. I could of pulled it alone."

There was no answer to that. It was the Big Feller who had introduced the extra aces into the game: it was he who had fought the way out with the money when discovery came. He was the one on whom the Twin Ponders would take revenge, if they could. Todd pocketed the bills.

"All right, Jake."

"Now!" Anderson gave a hitch that lifted the vast expanse of cloth stretched over his shoulders. "I got a hen on!"

"So quick? Ain't you going to lay off and take it easy for a while?"

"This is something big, Runt!" Jake stroked his sweeping mustache and stared off at the blue mountain tops. "Biggest thing I ever pulled. I'm going to be fixed for life!"

"Going it alone, Big Feller?" To lean up against the horse shed beside the giant made Todd more than ever conscious that he was a small figure of a man.

"Can't. Soon as I get rid of this shiner on my eye I'm going to go to Pineboro. Ever hear of Pineboro?"

"It's a little one-horse crossroads up in Clinton County. Why, it ain't much better 'n this town here!"

"Worse, Runt. Well, they's an old cuss named Hemmingway up there that don't believe in banks. He keeps store, and they say his money lays around in an old safe they had on Noah's Ark."

"That burg—"

"Shut up, you prune! All I say is there's going to be a connection between me and that money—I know how. I'm going to need you. You get to Pineboro a week after I do, and don't let on we know each other. Remember that. We're tee-total strangers. I'll let you know what to do later."

"What 'll I do while I'm waiting?"

"Don't care. Play poker, if them rubes up there know how."

The Runt sighed. He saw a distinct ethical difference between holding up a poker game and robbing a safe. He didn't like it—but the Big Feller would go in anyhow.

"I'm on," he said.

"All right." Anderson rose to his six feet three and stretched. "Now I'll get me some sleep and fix my eye. Don't forget that we don't know each other, and never did."

He was gone, shouldering his way through the quiet summer afternoon as though he scorned it. The Runt sighed. He finished the crackers and corn and lighted his pipe. The thought of this new affair depressed him a little, but to compensate was the lure of mystery, the self confidence of Jake, and promise of a good reward. But he didn't like it—not anything about it. The only excitement in Pineboro, as he remembered the place, was furnished by the town drunkard and the annual camp meeting.

For a dragging week Todd waited in Amesville. He took a few dollars away from those who wanted to court the thrills of draw or stud, but his soul was not in his work. He wanted, at least once, to give the universe a push by his own efforts, just as the Big Feller pushed and shoved it habitually. But the universe looked over his five feet seven, and saw him not. All that he did was to add impetus to another man's efforts. That was all, and he had resigned himself to it as better than nothing—he had even resigned himself to robbing a safe in order to be in on something big. Thus he went to Pineboro.

Todd arrived there at a week-end and found the place just like any other cross-roads village. It had a store and post-office combined, a blacksmith shop, a church, and, as a variation, a small saw-mill. The Runt did not visit the store, which was thronged with Saturday night traders, but sought what information he wanted among a few quiet souls who smoked in front of the blacksmith shop. From them he learned of a house that "took boarders," and, after he had announced that he was looking for work as a necessary excuse for his presence in town, he made himself at home at the boarding-house.

When Cal Todd came forth after Sunday breakfast and considered Pineboro in the full light of day and without the Sat-

urday stimulus, he doubted, for the first time in their acquaintance, the sanity of the Big Feller. It did not seem possible that there was any money in that town which could be pried loose. A few white houses with green blinds, and picket fences in front of them. Not even a barber shop or a poolroom. The only sign of recent activity was the trampled pasture back of the school-house, where the camp meeting had just been held.

The Runt sat down upon a nail keg in front of the blacksmith shop and groaned as he lighted his pipe. Either the Big Feller was crazy, or he wasn't. If he wasn't then how did he think he could get away with some old curmudgeon's money in a town like this where everybody was known to everybody else? It would take more brains than either one of them had shown in previous escapades.

And yet, deep in his mind, Todd did not doubt that Anderson could do it. He would get away with it just as he had got away with the Twin Ponds stunt. Big stuff—that was where Jake lived. Todd had lived without honest work for two years now and he had to admit that his good fortune had all been due to the power of Jake's personality. As he thought his faith became gradually restored and he had grown almost hopeful—when the impact of the greatest shock he had ever received in his life struck all the functions of his mind with a kind of paralysis.

The shock was the Big Feller himself. Of course he had expected to see Jake sooner or later—but not like this. For Anderson had on a "boiled" shirt and a white collar, and he was walking with a man who was unmistakably the minister, on one side of him, and a pretty girl on the other. His face was set in a Sunday grin, and he went primly stiff-legged in the direction of the church. The Runt's pipe fell from his hand.

"My Gawd!" he whispered. "The Big Feller has gone bughouse—he's a going to get married!"

In a moment Todd realized that it was not as bad as he had thought. Other people were going in the direction of the church, and the bell was ringing for the

second time that morning—it was the hour for the service. He breathed deep relief. Nevertheless the facts were serious enough. He did not know what to think, which way to turn mentally, and while his mind groped a voice spoke at his side.

“Fine looking fellow, ain’t he?”

Todd moved his head feebly and saw a stoop-shouldered, well weathered man of middle age. The eye, although a little reddened, held a kindly gleam, and the Runt clutched eagerly at him for a word of comfort.

“You mean the Big—that big man?” he asked. “Does he—does he live round here?”

“Ye-ah.” The stranger meditatively plucked a spear of grass and chewed it. “Leastways, it looks like he would. He come into town a week ago while the camp-meeting was going on, and I’m durned if he didn’t get religion!”

“Religion? Are you—*sure*?” Todd stumbled over his words; and he realized that his hand had reached out and seized the arm of the other man.

“Sure?” With indignation, and a touch of suspicion, the older man backed away from his grasp. “Sure? Didn’t him and me renounce all the works of the devil the same identical night right over there back of the schoolhouse? I been to camp meetings man and boy for forty year, and I never seen a more genuine case than his’n!”

“My Gawd!” said the Runt, for the second time that morning. The words of his new acquaintance continued to beat upon his ears.

“I’m Jeff Hawkins. If you don’t come from too fur off maybe you’ve heard tell of me. I’m all right after camp meeting until I get a whiff of hard cider or Jamaica ginger. But this here Mr. Jacob Anderson has got a genuine and lasting case. If he ain’t I’ll eat them number twelve shoes of his’n!”

The bell stopped tolling. The last of the stragglers hurried into church and Jeff Hawkins started on the run to join them. Calvin Todd remained on his nail keg, elbows on knees and head supported by well-nigh nerveless arms. He saw his pipe in the dirt at his feet. He saw the neat white houses and the blue sky and the gently

waving oaks and maples. But he felt that the savor had gone out of his pipe and the joy of being alive out of the world. If what Jeff Hawkins had said was true, then the world was not the same. If it was true—

The Runt was still clinging with all his strength to that “if” when the sedate Sunday stream began to flow out of the church door. He had sat there on the keg through a couple of hours of sermon and singing. He picked up his pipe. He would have bolted if he had not thought that he would attract less attention by remaining where he was. And so he might if the Big Feller, again with the girl and the minister, had not headed that way. While Todd was still thinking that of course Jake would go by without speaking, the three of them stopped dead in front of him. Anderson held out a big and compelling hand.

“Hello, Cal!” the Big Feller said, as his form swayed before the vision of Todd. “I’ve told the parson about you, and he says there’s hopes for you. Miss Cynthia Holmes and Rev. Griggs, this here is Calvin Todd, that comes from the same town I do.”

The minister took hold of the Runt’s hand and moved it up and down with pleasant words which were only so much sound to him. He swallowed a large lump.

“Yes, sir,” he said.

Then he felt his hand taken by a gentler, warmer clasp, and he looked into blue eyes that held a glint of fun and friendliness, but no mockery. They had to look up to him. He squared his shoulders. He did not know what she was saying.

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied.

“You needn’t bother about that business we was talking about,” rumbled the Big Feller. “I’ve changed all my plans, Cal. Just let it go and don’t think no more about it at all.”

They were gone. Todd followed the startled glances of other passers-by, and saw that his hand remained extended into the empty air. It required a conscious effort on his part to let it drop back to his side. To that extent was he numb, physically and mentally. He staggered a little as he walked back to the boarding-house, and once there, he hid himself in his room.

He lay down upon the bed. It was very good not to be obliged to stand up on his hind legs.

It was blackly true. If the Big Feller had been playing a game he would have ignored the Runt, according to program, until an opportunity came to meet by stealth. But he had openly called the whole thing off. His words there in front of the blacksmith shop had driven the last nails in the coffin of Cal Todd's hopes. No use. No go. The Big Feller had changed. Dammit.

The Runt forgot his dinner. For long hours that day he visioned a future of piker crap shooting, five-cent ante poker, and a minimum of food and tobacco. He would have to go it alone now. The prospect held no joys for him. The future was a desert—and at length he forced himself to turn from his own misery to a consideration of the new state of being into which Jake Anderson had come.

What had moved the Big Feller? One who did not know him so well might have said that the motive was obviously love—Jake Anderson promenading in a boiled shirt with a minister and a girl. Cal Todd knew better. Jake had always had girls, more or less, but if he had fallen so hard for a skirt that he would pass up a bundle of money, then he was no longer Jake Anderson, and white blackbirds could be shot out of any tree.

No; there was but one conclusion to be drawn. Religion or no religion, the Big Feller had gone straight. He had decided to hitch up with the folks who worked hard and paid their debts and didn't try to trim the world out of a living. In other words, he had gambled a period of years out of the joyous heart of his life for the ease and security of a later day. It was a very safe bet. Cal Todd knew that it was safe enough—if a man wanted to wager regular hours and sore muscles against a roof over his head and a barrel of flour in the pantry. Suddenly the bigness of the bet struck him with the force of a blow.

"Hell's bells!" he cried to the empty room. "It's the biggest thing the Big Feller ever done!"

His feet had swung to the floor as the

realization came upon him. His admiration for the Big Feller, which had been tottering, was reestablished in the twinkling of an eye. The Big Feller had run true to form—he had dumped the big stunt he had been going to pull for something bigger still. This was no weakening. It was Jake's final and overpowering proof of his bigness. Todd got up and began to walk the floor.

Into his mind seeped a gray glimmer, as light comes into a room when a door is opened very slowly. The light spread. The darkness was not—and Calvin Todd stood full in a flood of revelation.

"I'll stick to the Big Feller!" he said. "If he can do it, then, by Tophet, I'll do it, too!"

He sat down, exhausted, and let his head fall back against the tidied cushion of his chair. By luck and pure cussedness, as he called it, he had followed Jake through more than one escapade, and he could follow him now. That was the stuff! He'd get a job in the morning, if the sawmill was running; and next Sunday he, Calvin Todd, would go to church in a boiled shirt and a white collar. Beyond that his future did not unfold, for the supper bell told him that his stomach had gone flat against his backbone. He went down-stairs with his head up, and he shouldered the atmosphere just a little as he walked into the dining-room.

In a general way the immediate future was as Todd had conceived it. He got a job in the sawmill, he knew the torment of a lame back, and he had the considerable satisfaction of knowing that he was traveling the same road as Mr. Jacob Anderson. Jake, however, had got a week the start of him, in addition to the start which nature seemed to have given the Big Feller, and he was plucking much fruit from the tree of prosperity.

Jacob Anderson clerked in the store, and it was said he was talking of buying out old man Hemmingway. That was a long way from robbing the safe. Jake passed the plate in church already, and he had been asked to run for constable at the next election. Pineboro had swallowed the recent convert. Moreover, he had taken the lead

of the half-dozen young men who were trying to marry Cynthia Holmes, acknowledged to be the prettiest girl in the village. Todd was willing to admit that she was the prettiest girl in the world. Every evening he had seen her go to the store to get the mail, and every time he had seen her he had been more certain that the Big Feller was getting full measure, pressed down and running over, for his virtue.

It was more to look at her than to eat strawberries that the Runt went to the lawn party and festival which the Ladies' Aid Society held on the church lawn a short time after his advent in Pineboro. He could not any more help getting into her vicinity than a fly can keep away from a molasses barrel. He did not reason about it—he just let his legs take him, and when at last she saw him, and spoke, he felt satisfied with the price he had paid in respectability for this moment.

"Why, good evening!" she smiled. "You're Mr. Anderson's friend!"

"Yes, ma'am." The Runt sat down at her invitation and then edged toward the end of the bench away from her. Not for him was sentiment permissible with such a girl. Moreover, although Anderson had spoken to him with great coolness when he had gone into the store, his loyalty was not dimmed. "Yes, ma'am. Jake certainly is a fine feller."

"You've known each other quite a while, she says."

"Well, I guess so! Come from the same town, and we've been partners for a couple of years. He's a reg'lar feller, Jake is, and he ain't afraid of anything that walks, creeps, or crawls!"

She was looking at him with sober interest. This was his chance to give the Big Feller a boost, and he had drawn breath to start in again when she spoke.

"It's funny he happened to come to Pineboro—and you, too."

"Funny?" echoed Todd. He supposed Anderson had straightened all that out—hadn't he practically said so that Sunday in front of the blacksmith shop. "Didn't Jake tell you?"

"Tell me what, Mr. Todd?"

"Why—" Calvin began to see that he

had put his foot in it. "Why, he got religion, didn't he?"

"Well?"

She had him, pinned up like a butterfly against the wall. He flapped. Dammit! Why had Jake been so stand-offish? They ought to get together.

"Well, you see, after he got religion, what he come for"—the Runt swallowed, and finished with a gasp—"it wasn't what he come for, then!"

"You sound to me," said Miss Cynthia Holmes, "a good deal like a fish out of water."

"Yes, ma'am," admitted the Runt, with a vigorous nod, "I am."

"All right, then," she agreed, soothingly. "Now tell me what you two came to Pineboro for in the first place."

"I was going to help, in the first place." Todd paused to get out his blue and white polka dot handkerchief and wipe his forehead. "But Jake got religion. Then I made up my mind I'd go straight for good—and I'm beginning to like it—and then it was all off."

"What was off?"

"Why, what we was talking about, Miss Holmes!" He had floundered around badly, and he knew it, but now he was too far gone to hope that he could untangle his own words.

"What was that, Mr. Todd?"

"What was what?"

"What we talked about just now—what was it?"

"I—I—I don't know!"

After a moment Cynthia Holmes smiled. It was far from being an unfriendly smile, and yet there was a hint of a storm somewhere back of her eyes.

"Did you get religion, too, Mr. Todd?"

"No, ma'am."

"I thought you didn't," she said, as she rose from their bench, "because you're the worst liar I ever listened to!"

The first coherent thought to come up out of the Runt's welter of misery was that he had gummed things up for the Big Feller. Now he began to understand how hard it was to go straight. He had been a fool to think Jake would tell people about his past before he had had a chance to

make good. Todd took a solemn resolution to square things with Miss Holmes in some way.

Without waiting for that opportunity, however, he went over to the store and waited until the last loafer had left, despite frequent frowns from Anderson. When they were alone he went up to the counter.

"Jake," he began, in a low voice, "I'll say you're pulling off a big stunt, and I'm for you. But put me wise what you told and what you didn't. I don't want to make any breaks and queer you. Get me?"

"What's that?" roared Anderson, in sudden fury. Then he leaned over the counter and hissed: "What're you hanging around here for, anyway? Didn't I tell you it was all off that Sunday in front of the blacksmith shop? That safe is safe! You hear me? I ain't going to pinch a nickel!"

"Sure, Jake!" The Runt was more hurt in feelings than scared, somewhat to his own surprise. "I know you're on the level, and I'm trying to root for you! Just put me wise—"

"Beat it!" The Big Feller laid one hand on the counter as Todd had seen many a barkeep do. "Go back to Amesville and match pennies with the kids!"

Todd backed out of the store in silence. There was no use trying to argue with the Big Feller when he was in that mood. Todd did not blame him, for it was clearly a case of misunderstanding. Anderson probably thought he was hanging around to make trouble, for how could he know that the Runt had really gone straight?

Why, indeed, should Cal Todd stay in Pineboro? He could play this new game just as well in any other place. Of course desire to watch the Big Feller's shining example held him. And perhaps there was a desire to catch glimpses of Cynthia Holmes. She could not be anything but a glimpse to him. He would not let himself think of her in any other way. It was impossible to conceive of any woman rejecting the Big Feller, just as it was impossible to conceive of any man not wanting to marry Cynthia Holmes.

"He thinks I'm trying to put over something," muttered the Runt to himself as he slowly undressed that night. "That's

what. I guess I better beat it back to Amesville, or somewheres, like he said."

But the obstacles within himself did not permit his resolution to go into effect immediately. Here in this little village where he had first taken hold upon his soul and began to direct it in the way it should go, he had formed some attachments of a kind he had not known before. Since his hand was no longer against every man, he found that every man's hand was no longer against him. From the old lady who ran the boarding-house to the sawyer boss at the mill, people manifested more or less friendliness.

This continued. Old Hemmingway offered him credit at the store. Parson Griggs hunted him up one night, and before the end of the interview Cal Todd found himself thinking that there might be some good in ministers after all. The world was changing. He hesitated to tear up and transplant his slender roots. He kept away from the store as much as possible, but he stayed on day after day.

He ate abbreviated suppers in order to see Cynthia Holmes walk to the post-office in the cool of the evening. With the consciousness that he was doing the best he could, he lost any fear he might have had of Anderson, and sometimes he contrived to walk as far as the store with Cynthia. Finally he got the chance for which he worked—the opportunity to explain to her why they had come to Pineboro and to testify to the Big Feller's present state.

"I hope you believe he's give up planning to take a nickel, Miss Holmes," he said. "After the way I messed things up for him I'll feel better if I know you believe it."

"I believe it," she said. He knew that she spoke the truth, and he was satisfied.

What with waiting for this opportunity to undo the harm he had done to the cause of the Big Feller, and his reluctance to leave his new world, Calvin Todd was still in Pineboro on the evening when a part of the sins of Jake Anderson sought him out, and found him drugged with good fortune.

It was one of those calm, sweet twilights when the earth is tinted with rose and dusky purple for a long and restful time

before darkness comes fully. The Runt, coming out from supper, breathed gratefully. He saw Cynthia Holmes cross the street ahead of him. She turned and smiled and bowed, while he fumbled at his hat dejectedly. He was too late to-night: quite frequently she stayed there to talk to Anderson.

She went into the store. Todd saw a knot of men following after her—strangers. Strangers were too uncommon in Pineboro to pass without remark. And something about these men seemed familiar. He took a few rapid steps and caught a fair view of the face of one of them before he disappeared within the store. Pete Lamere, the barber of Twin Ponds! That big bulk beside him had been Joe Tyler, or his double. The other two must be Murphy and Pierce, of that memorable poker game.

Todd thought. The Big Feller was trapped. Old Hemmingway would not be back from supper yet. Nobody in sight except Zach Tompkins, eighty years old and rheumatic. They sure would do up Jake this time, for he couldn't run if he had a chance, and leave Cynthia. It would take too much explaining afterwards.

The Runt's nerve did not get stringy, to his own momentary surprise as he leaped up the steps of the store porch. He got to the doorway just as the actors inside arranged themselves in the instant before the climax. Cynthia was pressed back against some corded up bolts of cloth—frightened but not panicky. The Big Feller was at bay behind the counter on the opposite side of the store. Murphy crouched at one end of the counter, ready to head him off, and Pierce at the other. Lamere and Joe Tyler were advancing against him in a cautious frontal attack.

"Where's that four hundred dollars you stole?" roared Tyler.

"I guess we take four hundred dollars wort' out of your hide, Jake!" grinned Lamere. There was no mercy in that grin. It was time for the Runt to act.

"Come on, Big Feller!" he yelled; and with a whoop and a right swing he landed on Joe Tyler. The liveryman's cheek split to the knuckles of Todd, and he reeled until a cracker box brought him to the floor.

Pete Lamere turned. Todd's glance swept in the certainty of a bad five minutes for himself. Murphy and Pierce had charged upon Anderson, attacking from two sides. That left the Runt to face Lamere alone. His hope was that he might live until the Big Feller could rescue him. Better than that he did not count possible.

They met with a thud—the barber and the Runt. Todd struck home thrice upon a crimsoning nose as he went into the clinch; then the corded arms of Lamere locked across the small of his back and he knew that the Frenchman's reputation was not founded upon empty boastings. In vain he pounded at Lamere's ribs, while he was bent back and still farther back until swords of pain stabbed from hips to neck and swords of light leaped and flashed before his eyes. He saw bending over him the great face of Tyler, bleeding and rage distorted.

Where was the Big Feller? Surely he had had time to dispose of the others!

The Runt felt himself going down—the feet of the conquerors battered at his head—and the world vanished in black agony.

Calvin Todd found his body no pleasant dwelling place when he came back to it. It was a house of suffering. More pains, indeed, were there than he had ever known before. He was in no haste to see—hear think. For a time all of his forces were given over to a battle with feeling—feeling that now resolved itself into a hundred different hurts and now merged in one mighty ache.

At length he became conscious that a damp and pleasant coolness came and went upon his head. He tried to open his eyes, but only one of them responded. The other remained an ache. There was light. In a one-sided fashion he saw shelves of canned goods, and knew that he was lying upon a counter in Hemmingway's store. Then the face of the minister blinked at him, and he leaped to the belief that he was going to die. This became a conviction when Cynthia Holmes brushed Parson Griggs aside and put a fresh cloth upon his head. She was the kind of a girl who would fuss over a strange dog, if she thought it was going to die.

"Where—where's the Big Feller?" he asked, through lips that felt strangely cumbersome.

"There was a streak of dust went down the road while you was saving his life," replied Miss Holmes. "He was somewhere ahead of it."

There must be a big mistake. Calvin Todd felt that if he were about to die he must right that mistake. He pulled himself out of his misery, for it was up to him.

"Jake turned over a new leaf, honest to goodness!" he labored with his ideas. "I told you—"

"He told me all about robbing Mr. Hemmingway long before you did!" she interrupted; and her eyes crinkled with amusement. "Only he said you was the

desperate character that was going to do it, and he was a government detective sent to catch you at it! He told me that, and got religion the same day he found out I had three hundred acres of the best land in the township! Course he turned over a new leaf! He's been trying to marry my farm!"

The Runt forgot that he had thought he was dying. From other lips he would have believed no ill of Jake Anderson—but from her lips he must believe.

"My Gawd!" he whispered. "I reformed because I thought the Big Feller had gone straight!"

"Tommyrot!" snapped Cynthia Holmes. "It was your own self you was trying to catch up to all the time! You're the Big Feller!"



GROWING OLD .

THUS far I have contrived to keep
From falling into death's sound sleep.
I must be tough,
Else why, when many 'round me die,
Am I unsummoned? Have not I
Lived long enough?

The good die young, as has been said;
It must be toughness, then, instead
Of piety
That keeps me above ground, as 'twere.
But some day the Grim Harvester
Will garner me.

Yet there are reputable men
Who live long upon earth; why, then,
Judge I'm not straight,
Or think, because my physique might
Be tough, that I therefore am quite
A reprobate?

Tough? Yes, in some ways I might be.
That heart, though, which still beats in me
Is not a stone.
Time has, as yet, not hardened it.
This knowledge cheers me as I sit
Now, here, alone.

Clifford Phillips.

Thieving Youth

by Bella Cohen

"**S**HE was made to mourn," the neighbors would say when they heard David Lomoff clatter up the stairs unsteadily, swear loudly but with hazy accents, and then roll down to the bottom. Here he would generally burst into tears and call loudly for his wife.

"Fegele," he would cry, "come down to me. Oh, come down; the devils have thrown me down the stairs. Come to me quick, my beautiful Fegele. Oh—oh-oh!"

Then his wife, she who was made to mourn, would drop the coat she was tacking, and run swiftly down the stairs. In the darkness of the tenement hall only her bright, colorless eyes were visible, as she helped her drunken husband to his feet.

"Now, come, David, come up-stairs," she would gasp soothingly, her face flushing with the weight of his inert body.

"So, you're here, you wretch! Who called you?" And the big sot, who in pleading tones had just summoned his Fegele, would raise both his hands to drag her down to the floor. The tears would start to the eyes of the thin little woman, but she would make no effort to resist her enraged spouse.

She always tried not to scream, but the curious neighbors at their doors could hear her whimpers.

"Don't touch my head, David. David, you don't know what you're doing to me. I'm your wife, Fegele," she would moan, and then the shriek would follow, which was the signal for the magic appearance of all the occupants of the house, big and little.

Some one would then light the single gas-jet in the hall, whose tip the landlord had stuffed with absorbent cotton to insure economy.

"You boor—you brute! Why God gave you a man's body is a wonder to me! You roaring bull!" That would be Mrs. Singer, while her trembling old hands would wipe the blood away from the face of Mrs. Lomoff.

Here the big ragged fellow would lie down with contented grunts, empty milk bottles crowning his shaggy bulldog-like head, his feet spread out to a comfortable width.

"Now let's sing," he would say, "let's sing so my Fegele will hear us. She likes to hear me sing. Nu?"

"Come up-stairs first, then we'll all sing," some one would say, whereupon David Lomoff would rise like a pig who has been playing in the mud and shake himself.

Then, every one singing except bruised, moaning little Mrs. Lomoff, the curious group would escort the drunkard to the tiny home his wife kept up for him. It was on the third floor, and thus the group would be delayed at two landings, while Lomoff sang a solo.

As soon as the third floor was reached he would suddenly turn upon the men who had been pushing him up and demand the reason for their calling upon him. "Ah," he would say, "it's not me—you want to see—I knew that would be the case when I married her. She was too young for me."

And his Fegele, for whom they had all been singing, would shove her husband into his bedroom with the strength that must have been born of shame and utter hopelessness.

Whereupon the neighbors, shaking their heads sorrowfully, would depart to their homes on the various floors.

"She should leave him!" Thus old Mrs. Singer, who used a stick to aid her walking. She was more than sixty-five, and had already lost the sight of one eye.

"Where could she go?" her next-door neighbor, a young bride, would ask. "You forget that she has three children."

"And all of them girls," Mrs. Singer would grumble. "She has no luck, the poor thing, even in her children. Now, if she'd only had a boy—he wouldn't dare raise his hands against her."

Soon after all would be quiet again, except for the occasional sound of a meat-chopper at work, or a fretting baby wanting his mother to lie down with him.

Up-stairs, Mrs. Lomoff would resume her tacking of the men's coats, one of her eyes hidden under a handkerchief bound round her head. She would sigh frequently, while the grunting snores of her husband came to her in measured rapidity.

At six o'clock her oldest, a girl of seventeen, would come from her work in a department store on Fifth Avenue. She resembled her mother, with her thin blond hair and pointed face. Her small, long-lashed gray eyes had the same inquiring look that comes of fear. Her name was Anna.

At the sound of the snoring the girl would exchange a swift glance with her mother, who nodded slowly. The girl would snatch a paper bag lying on the table, and would then noiselessly tiptoe out of the house.

The other two children—Pauline, thirteen, and Selma, eleven—would never come up until late at night. Kind neighbors would see to that.

For ten years Mrs. Lomoff had gone through with this procedure, until little was left of the blond hair. The small gray eyes receded deeper into the head as the hot tears burned the lashes off.

And then one night David Lomoff came home, and after beating his wife, according to his drunken custom, died. No one mourned him. His wife alone shed tears for him.

Old acrid Mrs. Singer suggested a celebration, saying she would stand the expense. The others frowned at her levity,

for after all a dead man was a dead man; but they agreed with her. Instead of celebrating, Mrs. Singer offered to take care of Pauline and Selma while their mother went to work in a clothing factory.

"Between you and Anna, you ought to make a pretty good living for the little ones, until Pauline is old enough to go to work, and then—you will be a duchess!" she said.

And then faded Mrs. Lomoff, with tears in her eyes, bent down and kissed the gnarled old hands.

Comradeship, such as exists among the crowded East Side cliff-dwellers, is the child of wo and faith. It is the only bit of white light in lives filled with darkness, lightning and thunder.

With the passage to the other world of David Lomoff the little home became brighter. One week a new chair would find its way into it, and the next several new cups and saucers. Gradually the questioning look in Anna's eyes disappeared, and in its stead a smiling content came to stay. She even grew a bit, not very much, for her childhood had sapped her strength.

Pauline grew, too, but with the rapidity of a rich man's daughter, as Mrs. Singer complained.

Little Selma remained small, but filled out "like a little fat rabbit," and even Mrs. Lomoff attempted a little song when she got home at night. "Fegele" is the Yiddish for "birdie," and now the thin little woman was carrying out the figure in her name with a one-string shadowless voice that made old Mrs. Singer's heart weep.

When two years had gone by, Anna was transferred to the cloak and suit department, "for gentle behavior, tact, and a pleasing willingness that won the regard of our customers." This was rapid advancement indeed that no girl of nineteen in Otto's Department Store had ever hoped for.

With so much money coming into the little home, it was decided to move to a vacant three-room apartment on the first floor. Soon after, Mrs. Lomoff stopped working, and Pauline, now a tall girl of

sixteen, went into a millinery store to learn the trade. Her long fingers just naturally made something out of pretty bits of silk nothings. Before long she was teasingly flapping the little pay-envelope before her mother.

"Guess how much?" she asked, while her mother helplessly shook her head.

"It's more, I suppose, than I ever made in the shop," she replied.

Pauline nodded vigorously and laughingly pressed her mother to guess.

"Why don't you guess how much?" she entreated. "Well, then, I'll tell you. I've got ten dollars and seventy-two cents in that pay-envelope besides two dollars for a hat that I trimmed for a lady. What do you think of that?"

And Pauline danced over the kitchen floor in ungraceful strides and pirouettes. When her second girl acted this way, Mrs. Lomoff felt vaguely troubled. It brought up the memory of her husband, the first time he had struck her.

"Who was the lady?" asked Anna curiously. She was preparing to go to the theater.

"I don't know," Pauline shrugged her shoulders, "but her brother is a very fine looking fellow, take it from me. Do you know what he said to me? He said that he was sorry he was born a man, so I couldn't make a hat for him."

Pauline snickered.

"He kept talking about my fingers so much that I thought I would surely let the needle run into them. Some fellow! He beats your Bauman by a mile, when it comes to style."

"Maybe," was Anna's cryptic comment, "but it's the fellow that has style that forgets such a thing as manners."

With this parting shot Anna, still drawing on her white kid gloves, left to meet her Bauman, and thence to the theater. Bauman was a successful salesman in the house of Semon & Frittel, creators of the Swoon Silk and the car advertisements that featured screen vampires only, draped in the silk that had made them famous.

Mrs. Lomoff, much as she disliked hearing the girls quarrel, always concealed her delight when they talked of the various

men they met in the course of their work. Their chatter somehow revived the little youth that must have lain dormant within her all those years. And Mrs. Lomoff began to dream.

She did not dream of marriage so much as love. Recognizing this remarkable and impious phase of her dreams, she one day sent for a Hebrew teacher, a religious old bearded Jew of sixty or more. He was very little and spoke in a curious falsetto that won Mrs. Lomoff's pity immediately. She wanted him to help her perfect her Hebrew so that she could read the prayer-books more assiduously, she told him. He told her that she was a good woman. In this way her interest in reading was stimulated, but instead of reading the Hebrew books she turned her attention to the daily Yiddish newspapers.

The old Hebrew teacher, who came every day, used to read the newspapers with her, and helped her when she mispronounced. He had come in this way for two months before Mrs. Lomoff decided that it was impious of her to have him come when she could read as good as he. It was hard telling him, and Mrs. Lomoff almost broke down in the interim.

"I can't tell you how much you have helped my reading," she said.

"Eh?" the little old teacher replied. He was slightly deaf. "What's that you say?"

Mrs. Lomoff knew immediately then that she was hurting him, but she could not withdraw since she had already taken the step.

"I say," she said a little louder, "that I won't need you no more."

"So?" the old man's falsetto cut Mrs. Lomoff to the quick, and she burst into tears.

"Why—why are you crying?" her teacher demanded.

Mrs. Lomoff did not reply, but instead set down tea and cake in front of him.

"Well! Well!" he muttered, helping himself to both. "Well! Well!"

When he had finished he wiped his mouth and patted Mrs. Lomoff's little work-worn hand, until a pink flush mounted to her cheeks. Then he kissed the

"mazzuza" on the wall, a sacred emblem saluted on entering and leaving a Jewish home.

And Mrs. Lomoff watched him patter down the stairs, her eyes filled with tears. She did not know the reason for her tears, but what, oh, what would he have said if he knew that she had sent him away because she might fall in love with him?

II.

It was not until after Anna had married her Bauman and gone away to live with him in the Bronx that Mrs. Lomoff came to the realization that dreaming of love was perhaps not so impious. Not that she gave herself free rein. It seems that Mrs. Lomoff was born to repress things. When her husband had first married her she had repressed her dreams of a three-roomed home. When her husband had beat her, she had choked the cries that came into her throat. When her Anna had left her, she fought back the tears that rose to her eyes.

And now she was slowly but surely giving herself up to these dreams that even her little Selma would have thought ridiculous. But then Selma was a hard-headed little girl for her seventeen years, with a facility for adding numbers that astonished her mother.

She was practical to the extreme, so that easy-going Pauline had no fears of there not being enough to run the house when she married. Her mother waited in momentary anticipation for the news to break. Whenever her long-legged, slim daughter bounced into bed, which she now had for herself since Anna's marriage, Mrs. Lomoff was prepared for the announcement: "Momma, I'm going to be married!"

It did not come until Selma was eighteen, and then Pauline simply stepped up to her little mother, picked her up into the air, and then set her down with a kiss on either cheek.

"He's a fine fellow, momma—not like other men," she said breathlessly; "and he's got a car and no mother."

"Who is he?" demanded Selma before timid Mrs. Lomoff could find her voice.

"Well, grandma," mimicked Pauline, "he's the man I met when you were in your short skirts. He's the man whose sister gave me my first bit of spending money for making her a hat. He's the man who's stuck to me for two years, without making himself a pest. He's the man who—"

"Oh, that's enough," interrupted Selma. "Have you set a day?"

Pauline nodded briskly as she unpinned her hat.

"Everything. Day, license, rabbi, car, honeymoon, home—not in the Bronx," she trilled.

Selma heaved a sigh and then deposited her small person on a chair while Pauline pretended to throw water on her.

"Say, grandma," the bride-to-be remarked, throwing her hat into a corner, "I'm not so sure about you, either."

"Why—what—did you hear anything?" The younger girl suddenly sat up in her chair, a blush rising to her face.

"Nothing, you little fool," laughed Pauline.

But the little, slightly bent mother, unnoticed by the two, had caught Selma's blush, and she sighed. Soon—who knows?—Selma would marry, and she would be alone.

Pauline seemed to be thinking of that, too, for she asked in the same bantering tone:

"Grandma, when do we get a grandfather in the family?"

"You mind your business," returned Selma, rolling up her sleeves from her plump brown arm. Selma was very small, as dark as her mother was fair.

Her mother always wondered where she got her almond-shaped black eyes and her business instinct. Neither she nor her husband had possessed either.

After the girls had gone to sleep, Mrs. Lomoff remained awake, in an effort to suppress the wave of the loneliness that had overwhelmed her. After she had dropped off, smiles played about her tired, thin mouth, and in the morning the little woman was miserable.

If she only knew how to drive those impious dreams out of her sleep! The devil

himself could create no worse, Mrs. Lomoff decided. Why, she had not even seen the face of the man who had kissed her in her dreams!

"Why, mamma, you haven't looked at me once!" Pauline reminded her prior to starting to work. "What's the matter?"

"You're not sick?" questioned Selma anxiously, who had heard only the latter part of her sister's remark.

The little woman shook her head and then mumbled something about its being late for work, without looking up.

"Wait a minute, Selma!" cried out Pauline, as the two started for the stairs. "I forgot to tell mamma something."

Pauline entered without warning and found her mother sitting sorrowfully near the table.

"Why, what's the matter, mamma? What are you crying for?"

"I'm not crying, my child—and if I am, haven't I reason?" was the Delphic response.

"Selma will be with you," Pauline reminded her.

Mrs. Lomoff wiped her eyes and nodded sorrowfully.

"What did you come back for?" she asked.

Pauline stood lost in thought with her mouth open. Her eyes darted all over the room, skipping over walls, ceiling, floor, and windows.

"Gee, if I didn't forget," she announced finally. "What a head I've got! It's nothing important, I betcha. Well, it don't matter."

The girl shrugged her shoulders and then approached the door. Suddenly she turned back to put her lean, long arms about the little mother with an angular motion that love alone made graceful.

"Don't cry, little mamma," she whispered. "Worse things than a happy marriage could happen to me."

A moment later Pauline was on her way to work, with Selma panting at her heels.

"Hey, Paul, I can't—walk so fast!" she finally called out in short, quick gasps.

Pauline turned to look over her shoulder, and then stopped at the sight of her sister's strangely pale face.

"What's the matter with *you*?" she asked. "You ain't sick, are you?"

"I think I'll just rest a little bit," her sister replied, still breathing heavily. "I'm all right—it's just that I can't keep up with you—you run so fast."

Gradually Selma regained her quiet, measured breathing, and the two resumed their walk to work.

"What took you so long up-stairs?" asked Selma presently.

"Mamma was crying."

"Why?" the question came in startled tones.

"Because I'm getting married, I think."

"Why should she cry then?" in relieved tones.

"I guess she's afraid you're next, and then she'll be all alone. You know how mothers are."

"How do I know how mothers are?" Selma retorted so sharply that Pauline opened her eyes wide in surprise.

"What's eating you, Selma?" she asked. "You know it's a little hard to be all by yourself."

"But she won't be all by herself!" the younger girl cried. "I swear I'll never leave her."

At home Mrs. Lomoff was still sitting in the rocker with that same dazed look that had made Pauline late for work. With her mind's eye she saw them all gone—the three that she had reared to womanhood.

Anna did not come to see her mother any more. It was too far, she would say in her letters that accompanied the monthly checks. Soon Pauline would be saying that it was too far. And then Selma, her youngest, would be saying it was too far. With a sigh Mrs. Lomoff finally rose and began to clear the table away.

It was noon before the little home was clean and in order and Mrs. Lomoff was ready to call for her pound and a half of meat at the butcher's. On her way out she stopped to talk to old Mrs. Singer, who lived in the back. A little more bent, a little more wrinkled with the soft, warm, thin skin one sees under the wing of a newborn sparrow, was Mrs. Singer now.

The same cynical lines that wove little

webs round the corners of her mouth were deeper, but the eyes that looked from beneath their thin, lashless lids were small and bright.

She looked up as Mrs. Lomoff entered.

"Nu, Fegele, have you heard the news?" she asked. Her piping voice was still unchanged. Not even the trembling quality that comes with old age had invaded it.

"What news?" asked Mrs. Lomoff.

"Why—the butcher's wife died—she died last night."

Mrs. Lomoff was silent for a moment.

"One must expect death," she said finally. Her impending loneliness had assumed proportions greater even than the death of one who had suffered for years. True, she had hardly ever seen the dead woman.

"He will be all alone—now," Mrs. Singer went on.

"The butcher, you mean?" said Mrs. Lomoff. "Ah, it is hard to be alone. One grows old so much faster." Mrs. Lomoff sighed.

The old woman looked up at her. It was a common saying in the house that Mrs. Singer saw more with her one eye than some people with their two.

"Don't worry yourself, Fegele, you are not getting old," she said. "Why look at me, you little fool? I feel as young as a woman of thirty. Ah, yes, Fegele, my children left me just as they are leaving you, but we must bite our lips together and soon—soon the wo is not so hard to bear." Mrs. Lomoff was silent, and the old woman continued: "Do you know, Fegele, that you are still good to look at?"

The younger woman blushed and stirred uneasily. The old woman's words reminded her of that impious dream of the night before when she had not even seen the face of the man who had kissed her.

"Yeh, yeh, Fegele, you don't have to get red like a beet before me. How old were you, anyway, when you married? Sixteen—eh? That's what I thought." The old woman laughed aloud.

"And you're afraid that you will be lonely," she said. "Why, Fegele, I think that you could still bring a child into—"

But Mrs. Lomoff would not listen any longer.

"You are making fun of me!" she cried, running to the door. "Never did I think that you would laugh at me like this!"

Angered beyond the control of her own every-day self, Mrs. Lomoff banged the door and hurried into the street. The old woman at the window shook her head.

"What fools these young ones are!" she said to herself, reaching for the cane. "Does she not know that I would sooner cut my right hand off than hurt one little hair of her head? Ah—these young ones, these young ones!"

Mrs. Lomoff turned into another street to buy her meat, for now that the butcher's wife was dead the store would be closed for a week at least. She sighed a little as she thought of the butcher as she had seen him daily for the last five years. He was the only one of Mrs. Lomoff's acquaintances who could work and tell jokes at the same time. One was always sure of finding a smile on the face of Yussef Samuels, even if the rest of the world were black with scowls.

The old beggar near the synagogue, whose red, bleary eyes always cried, wondered why his regular noon patron forgot her daily penny. For Mrs. Singer's words were still ringing in her ears. She was still disturbed when Pauline came home in the evening. Selma did not get back until both were in bed.

However, the days that followed were busy ones for Mrs. Lomoff, knee-deep in preparations for Pauline's wedding. She had not a chance to breathe until Pauline was on her honeymoon in Lakewood. Pauline's husband was truly a man of style.

Gradually things simmered down to the daily normal turn that is expected of all of us, and Mrs. Lomoff settled down to her household duties that she saw diminish before her very eyes.

The pain of her impending loneliness came upon her with full force on the day that she went to the butcher-shop and Yussef Samuels asked: "How much?"

"Make it three-quarters of a pound," she replied.

"You're losing weight," Samuels remarked through his black, bushy beard. The loss of his wife had evidently made no deep impression upon the light-hearted butcher. In six months one forgets.

Mrs. Lomoff smiled sadly.

"One loses weight when daughters grow up and marry and go away," she said.

"So you too are alone?" Samuels asked, but without his smile.

For the first time, Mrs. Lomoff noticed that she was the only customer in the store. It frightened her, this little woman who would soon be listening to her oldest daughter's son lisping "Booby," the Yiddish diminutive for grandmother.

She nodded and hurriedly took the package of meat, almost bumping into Mrs. Singer, who was just entering the store. She did not heed the latter's greeting, but with flaming cheeks almost ran out of the place.

The next day she heard Mrs. Singer's stick tapping its way to her door, and then the old lady herself entered.

"That's a fine way to treat me," said Mrs. Singer, after she had seated herself. "Believe me, I wouldn't treat a dog that way, much less an old woman."

Mrs. Lomoff interrupted hastily. "Oh, believe me, it was not so much my fault—but—but—" She floundered, and then Mrs. Singer laughed, her wheezy, piping laugh.

"To-night he's coming to see you," she said, rubbing the head of her cane with her open palm.

"Who?" asked Mrs. Lomoff, a slow blush creeping over her thin, pointed face.

"He—the butcher," nodded the old woman. "It is lonely for him in his home, he says. All his sons and daughters are married and don't live with him—so it's not strange for a man to feel lonely. One of his sons lives so far away as Colorado—and the others could live over there too, as much as they come to see their father. It's a lot you can expect from your own children—the best years of your life they take away, and then they leave you."

"But only six months his wife is dead," Mrs. Lomoff remonstrated.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Go, do with him something," she said, reaching for her cane. "A man is a man."

III.

TRUE enough, the butcher came that night. He knocked timidly on the door and then entered, his face ruddier than ever. If Mrs. Lomoff had looked close, she would have seen fine points of perspiration standing along the rim of his skull-cap which he wore underneath his hat. As he approached to shake her trembling hand a chair got in his way, and with the best of intentions the butcher kicked it over.

The little blond woman apologized for the chair in a halting fashion that compelled the big, red-faced man to assure her that it was nothing—really nothing at all. After they were finally seated he cleared his throat several times before he said:

"For such a month, it is warm, don't you think, Mrs. Lomoff?"

"To tell you the truth, I think last year at this time—it was—a little bit—colder," Mrs. Lomoff replied.

"October is a cold month," he granted.

"But the *real* cold weather comes next month," she announced.

"Yeh, sometimes you can smell the snow almost," the butcher acquiesced, forgetting that he had opened the conversation with a remark on the warmth of the weather.

Mrs. Lomoff sniffed the air and then shook her head.

"Maybe," she said.

A silence followed which the clock on the mantelpiece spent in ridiculing the two. Where had the conversational powers of Yussef Samuels fled? He cleared his throat once more.

"Colorayda is far, far from here," he announced.

Mrs. Lomoff brightened visibly.

"Yeh," she said, "your oldest son, he lives there, not?"

The butcher nodded gratefully.

"My daughter Lily, she is next to the oldest, she lives in Pennsylvania."

Mrs. Lomoff looked intensely interested. The butcher noticed this and slid farther back into his chair. He continued easily:

"She's got a little girl what can play a fiddle, and a little boy what can add numbers like we can—we can—eat, so easy it is for him."

"My Selma, she can add numbers too," Mrs. Lomoff burst in eagerly. "She's my youngest girl—the only one what's still with me." She paused to sigh. "When she was no bigger than that stool there, Mr. Samuels, she could already say her numbers backward. Such a head she's got!"

When the time arrived for the butcher to leave he looked about warily lest any chair block his progress, and then assumed his lordly height with a conquering air.

"May I come again—say—maybe next week?" he asked when he was at the door.

Mrs. Lomoff, who had been trying to summon up all her courage to frame the invitation, nodded. Both shook hands with a formality that almost drove the cynical clock into convulsions.

After the butcher left, Mrs. Lomoff wandered about the little home in an aimless way. It was only when the delicious odor of burning meat came to her that she stopped.

As she stirred the stew, she looked up at the clock and wondered anxiously where Selma could be. It was almost ten. Her elation vaguely dropped away from her.

Why was Selma so late always? The night before she had come home after the lights in the hall were out and had not even greeted her mother! Then her thoughts went back to the butcher with his kindly red face and she dreamed, the spoon hovering above the pot of meat. Her dreams took no definite form. They had no beginning and they had no end. They were like the spirals of vapor arising from the boiling meat.

Suddenly, like a streak of lightning, the anxiety that she felt concerning Selma returned.

Where could her girl be?

She drew the pot to one side and covered up the fire for the night with a layer of burnt-out coals. Then she lowered the gas-light and started to go to her bed, shivering slightly. But, looking back over her shoulder, she decided to return to the kitchen.

Perhaps Selma would come in soon and she might be hungry and too tired to help herself, so she settled herself back into the rocker.

It was an hour later, when her head was nodding weakly over her breast, that the knob turned stealthily and her youngest entered. In the dim light, she did not see the dozing figure in the rocker or perhaps she would not have thrown her hands up toward the ceiling and then brought them down, tightly clasped, over her head. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Her mother, with the sensitiveness of the light sleeper, opened her eyes slowly and saw her youngest beating her breast with her fists.

"Selma!" she cried.

The girl started and dropped her hands in a hopeless way. The little mother rose from the rocker and almost ran to the side of her youngest born.

"You are tired—eh?" she soothed kindly. "Tired, not?" She led the girl to the rocker. "I have a nice stew and it is still hot—" She was now bustling about the stove. Somehow she could not find the pot nor the spoon! Just where she put the pot? Why did her hands tremble with that nameless dread? Her head felt curiously dizzy and, without meaning to, she spun around suddenly.

Her eyes, sharpened by fear, saw her Selma sitting straight up in the rocker, her hands interlocked in her lap and the slow tears running down her cheeks.

For the first time it struck her mother that her Selma was getting thin and pale! What kind of a mother was she to permit this?

Bitter reproaches rushed to her lips—but they got no farther as suddenly Selma's voice came to her, a pale voice, and thin to the breaking point.

"I don't want nothing to eat."

"What?" asked her mother. She was not sure that this voice belonged to her Selma. "You don't want nothing? Ah, but it is such a good piece of meat—"

Selma's voice interrupted, sharp with pain.

"I said once I don't want nothing to eat."

"A little hot tea, maybe?" Mrs. Lomoff almost whispered this.

"N-nothing—I am not hungry." The girl rose from the rocker and thrust her hands into the air again and brought them down, clenched, over her head.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "What will I do, what will I do?"

For a moment every muscle in Mrs. Lomoff's body turned to ice. She could not move. Even her eyes did not see. Her tongue stuck out from between her frozen lips. The girl walked up and down and then suddenly stopped her walk of mourning and reached up to the gas-jet. As the blue-tipped flame leaped up, she stepped directly underneath the light.

"Look at me!" she cried, flinging her coat off. "Look! Look!" The strange, taut voice broke as she saw her mother's eyes widen. For a moment the two regarded each other.

"You might have told your mother you are married, Selma," the little mother said gently.

"Married!" came her daughter's voice with the force of a stone flung with perfect aim. The little mother's face contracted with pain. "Oh, God, my body feels like broken glass!"

IV.

WHEN the stars were beginning to fade from the sky, little Mrs. Lomoff was still sitting by her daughter's bedside holding her cold hands within her warm grasp. Tears had left their traces on the faces of both mother and daughter, but the face of the latter was no longer taut.

Now that the unbearable strain of the secret carried so many months alone, had broken, Selma's face assumed a little of its old semblance. It would never be the same, her mother thought as she watched the spasms of pain chase across it. Her poor little Selma, who could add numbers better than her sisters, who would have thought of her being fooled by soft words and a handsome face? And to think of her young-est born carrying that secret all alone.

"Where were my eyes?" she reproached herself. "Where were my eyes? So wrapped up I was in myself that I couldn't

see my little Selma's trouble. What a mother I have been, God forgive me."

The little woman almost sprang from her seat as the image of Yussef Samuels's smiling face, with his pleading eyes, appeared.

"Away," she whispered, "away—"

The image fled—to return in distorted ways on the wall, in the droop of a curtain or the folds of the covers. Slowly, although trembling with suppressed haste, the little mother replaced the cold hands under the covers and then shuffled noiselessly into the kitchen. The fire had gone out, but Mrs. Lomoff was hot with shame. Of a sudden, the dancing face vanished, this time it did not return, and Mrs. Lomoff sank into the rocker, her face buried in her hands.

"What will she do, my poor little Selma?" she moaned. "What will she do?"

She could not sit. Backward and forward, she walked across the floor, wringing her hands. Never once did she think of the shame that she would be compelled to suffer in her old age. Never once did she think that the finger of scorn would be leveled at her—as well as at Selma. All that she could feel and think of was that her poor little Selma's life was ruined.

"No good man will want her," she told herself, still wringing her hands, "and what will my little one do, with a baby saddled on her? God be merciful—" The little mother had no more tears to shed and her eyes burned as if the sockets held live coals.

"I must do something," she muttered as she stopped near the stove. She looked into the uncovered pot of stew with its congealed fat on the surface. She did not see it—all she saw was her Selma's face as it looked under the gas-light.

Exhausted, she dropped into the rocker again and stared straight ahead of her into the eery darkness, trying to pierce its mystery.

Just as the first streak of dawn slashed its way across the sky, the weary mother closed her eyes and slept.

When she awoke, Selma was already about.

"Nu, did you ever see such a sleeper like me?" her mother exclaimed, glancing at the clock. It had stopped, but she went on: "It already is more than ten and the

stove not yet made—and no breakfast—Selma, you ought to report me—that's what you should do."

Chattering in this fashion, Mrs. Lomoff started a fire and placed the coffee-pot on the hottest place.

"Now—" she exclaimed. "Now—to make myself look like a human being. Like a wild Indian, I must look—eh, Selma?"

Mrs. Lomoff was afraid to stop talking—she did not know why. While she washed and smoothed back her sparse hair, she kept up an incessant stream of chatter—commenting on the coldness of the water, the dust on the little looking-glass over the sink and other items as her roving eyes suggested them. She could not meet the girl's. She said her morning prayers in a loud voice, prolonging the words.

"Now—that coffee—it smells good," she began again.

The girl fixed her gaze upon the worn little face opposite her and with its intensity slowly forced her mother's eyes to meet her own.

"Nu—what is it, Selma?" the mother crooned, pillowing the dark head against her breast. "You mustn't take on so—"

"Oh, but what will I do?" the girl wailed. Her spirit had left her a weak and cowardly thing. "What will I do? In two months—momma—in two months."

Something went through the mother's body that cut her like a knife. She remembered with what joy and pride her Anna had said these very words:

"Two months — momma — in two months!"

"It will come out all right, Selma," she soothed. "God is good to us. He will not leave us—"

The girl shook her off impatiently.

"Then why did He leave me when I needed Him most, momma?" she cried.

"Sha, Selma!" Her mother bit her lips. "You mustn't talk in such a way—maybe you want a little egg?"

The girl shook her head. She rose and lifted her hands to bring them down, clasped over her head. It was the motion of the night before and it troubled her mother more than anything her daughter had said or done. She was afraid of it.

Neither spoke. The girl walked back and forth, her body swaying, her eyes shut. Suddenly she stopped and faced her mother.

"Well, ma, why don't you say something?" she cried. "Can't you help me now?"

Now? Her mother hung her head—the word implied that she had failed to watch over her daughter—and that that daughter's dishonor was not Selma's but her own. True, true—she had failed. Hers was the punishment—but—

"Selma," she cried out. The girl stopped her pacing. Something in her mother's voice arrested the tumult in her breast.

"Well?" she asked.

"Selma—I didn't want to tell you until we moved away," her mother said slowly. "Selma, don't worry yourself, child of mine. You will be again yourself—only don't take on so—"

"What did you want to tell me?" The girl was impatient.

"Where we will move, Selma, nobody will know us"—her mother plucked at her apron nervously—"and who will be the wiser—if I say that the baby is mine? No—don't talk, Selma, listen to me. I have nothing to lose. I am not a young girl no more. I am old—but not so old that people will not believe that the child is mine. And you—why—you have all the years of your life to live in. You are young, Selma—and perhaps—your destined one will still come to you. Maybe, Selma, you won't like to stay with me and the baby—then you can go and maybe live with your sisters—even with strangers. Only, Selma, hold fast to yourself—you are still young. Life is just beginning for you—Nu, Selma, take a drop of coffee."

The girl's hands hung loosely at her sides, while her dark eyes were fixed upon her mother's face as if they would never move from it.

"Nu, Selma?"

V.

THAT afternoon, when Selma had fallen into a doze, old Mrs. Singer came to the door, but Mrs. Lomoff motioned her away. But the old woman, with insistent beckoning, stood her ground until Mrs. Lomoff

indicated that she herself would go to see her in a little while. After making sure that the girl was comfortably asleep, her mother knocked at her neighbor's door.

The old woman was sitting near the window, feet resting on the table-edge, paring potatoes. She looked up sharply as Mrs. Lomoff entered, but said nothing.

For a while the two sat in silence, but Mrs. Lomoff could feel the old woman's curious eyes upon her.

"Was the butcher by you last night?" she finally asked.

"Sha—" begged the younger woman.

"I am asking you something—what's wrong about that?" queried Mrs. Singer, slightly aroused.

"Because my head—it is filled with troubles—God help me!" cried Mrs. Lomoff. "Black are my years."

Mrs. Singer dropped the knife into the pan of potatoes and wiped her hands upon her apron.

"What is it, Fegele? Is it something with—" She left the question unanswered, cursing herself for her tactlessness.

"You know?" asked the little mother. She grasped the old hands tightly within her own while her colorless eyes burned with their appeal.

"Me?" retorted the old woman sharply. She shook her head. "May God help me, I don't even know what you're talking about, Fegele."

The little mother had not the persistence to insist on what Mrs. Singer had meant when she stopped so suddenly. The old woman bent forward and awkwardly stroked the other's hands. Bit by bit, the story of Selma and the handsome youth who ran away came from the mother—not in the torrent of words that her little girl had used, but in the weak fashion that Mrs. Singer knew so well. Fegele had talked just that way when her husband had beaten her for the first time.

In the same colorless, halting manner, the little bowed woman told of her solution to the problem.

"I thank God that Selma is willing," she added. "It was a fight for me to get her to say yes!"

Mrs. Singer suppressed a sniff with diffi-

culty. She raised her cane as if to strike some invisible thing, but let it fall with a hand that acknowledged defeat.

"Oh, children, children, how much must we suffer for you?" she murmured. Old calloused Mrs. Singer, whose tongue women, and men, too, feared for houses around, was crying.

"Fegele—if there is a God—it must still be good for you." Her hand trembled as she grasped the cane again, as if to rise. She sat back, however, and looked from underneath her shriveled lids into space, until all was darkness before her.

"Eh, Fegele—you have suffered enough," she said. "It has been nothing but trouble for you."

Mrs. Lomoff rose from her chair and looked about hurriedly. She thought she heard Selma's voice. Without a backward glance she shuffled quickly to the door and left.

When she was gone the old woman rose heavily to her feet. The potatoes lay neglected in the pan—but she did not see them now. She saw the faces of children before her—countless smiling faces.

"Ah—you robbers, you robbers!" the old woman cried. She lifted her cane threateningly and the mocking faces vanished.

VI.

YUSSEF SAMUELS could not wait for the following week to come, and so he presented himself at the door of Mrs. Lomoff's home on the night following his first call. The little woman appeared agitated at sight of him and the butcher naturally ascribed her fluttered state to his presence. His smile grew broader and more self-assured as he saw the patches of pink deepen over the peaks of her cheek-bones. Truly, the little Widow Lomoff might make a pretty partner, thought the butcher, with a little fattening up.

He shook hands with her in an easy, confident way—holding her bony little fingers in his a little while longer than is absolutely necessary when one is complying with the demands of formality.

With the same easy confidence, he chose the rocker in which to deposit himself. His

broad, good-natured face shone with that rubicund glow that contrasted so freshly with his curly, black beard. The butcher's nether lip was soft and thick and red—to-night it was all three and more. He had his holiday skull-cap on, made of shiny, black satin. No beads of perspiration were strung round the edge now—a smooth, unwrinkled brow was its southern boundary.

"Well—what should you think should happen to me now," he began, smiling and fumbling in his vest-pocket, "but that I should get a letter from my son in Coloraydo."

Mrs. Lomoff did what was expected of her.

"And what does he write?" she asked. Her voice was surprisingly soft to the bearded man in the rocker. He lowered his own as best as he could. It was a serious effort for him, but somehow he felt that the occasion—the occasion which he was to make—demanded soft tones.

"Of what does a young father write?" he replied. "His children—his wife—their health. He—he wants me to come out to Coloraydo. He thinks maybe I could buy a nice business out there. He says that it costs half as much to live out there as it does here."

Mrs. Lomoff straightened up in her chair and tried to smile.

"So I suppose you will soon be leaving?" she asked, spreading out her fingers on her lap.

The man eyed her hungrily.

"Maybe I'll go," he said, looking through the space between his knees. "Maybe—Coloraydo is a nice country, my son writes. I got a picture postal-card here"—handing it to her—"it's from only a little part of Coloraydo."

Mrs. Lomoff studied the card in silence. The picture showed a densely wooded section with the customary blue and white clouds drifting on an azure sky. It made a deep impression on her, the butcher was inclined to think, as he watched her warily.

"Maybe you'll like to come over there—" He was now holding his knees in place with both his hands.

A young girl would have coyly suggested that she did not understand, but Mrs. Lom-

off knew that this was Yussef Samuels's way of asking her to be his wife. She opened and closed her bony fists and ran her tongue around her lips. Then she shook her head.

"What?" queried the butcher. He rose from the rocker and stood over the trembling little woman.

"We are too old," she said slowly; "the very children on the streets would laugh at us!"

"Let them laugh!" cried Samuels. "Let them."

The butcher pleaded. He was lonely. With her he could go to "Coloraydo" and be near his son, and both he and she would spend their old age in idleness. Then he began to storm inwardly and was silent.

"We are not too old," he burst out finally; "no one is too old to give comfort to another."

Little Mrs. Lomoff listened, crumpled up in her stiff-backed wooden chair. Here was a man who asked her to marry him, who truly loved her, who would be kind to her; his kindness was known to every man, woman, and child on the block.

She shook her bowed head.

"No, no," she said, "we are too old. We must not make fools of ourselves at our time in life." She cleared her throat and then began kneading her fingers into the palms of her hands.

"But why?" the big butcher insisted.

The little woman could only shake her head again. She did not lift her eyes until she heard the butcher approach the door. She looked up and saw his broad back, with one shoulder a little higher than the other. To Mrs. Lomoff's eyes the back was big and powerful. Under dispassionate observation it was an old and tired back that had once been big and powerful. After all, the butcher was past fifty years of age, and some shoulders slope with young men of thirty.

Mrs. Lomoff rose and walked over to him with hasty steps.

Timidly she touched his sleeve.

"You are not angry at me?" she asked.

For answer he took her hot little hand between his large, rough, clammy ones. His beard glistened in spots. The big butcher was crying.

For a fleeting moment the little woman wanted to tell him that she would go with him to "Coloraydo"—that they were not too old—that she needed him as much as he needed her, but she choked down these utterances and the old man, who had set his heart on her saying "yes" left.

Mrs. Lomoff listened to his heavy step creaking down the stairs and then she went into the bedroom. Her Selma was fast asleep.

The old couple had not disturbed her slumbers.

VII.

IN the days that followed, Selma rarely left the house. She sat and sewed most of the time, resting frequently. While in her presence her mother chattered unceasingly in the effort to interest her daughter in things about her. The girl listened, but the dull look in her eyes never changed. Although they were less strained and not altogether hopeless, there was the indifference in them that was born of suppression. The girl suffered, but from her mother she inherited that power of endurance when she would bite her lips together, although she felt that that shaft of pain would be her last.

One day an automobile drove up to the door and took Selma away to the hospital. The automobile belonged to Anna. Neither she nor Pauline came to see the girl. Not that they did not think it was their duty, but because their little mother had begged them each not to come. She had gone first to one in the Bronx and then to the other on West End Avenue—a long and terrible ride for the timid little woman. She lost her way several times, but by holding up the addresses to kind strangers and waiting in that hesitant way of hers until they could make out the penciled ciphers, she finally reached her destinations.

Anna was just putting her little girl to sleep when her mother entered. Without turning her head, she had placed her finger to her lips to indicate enforced silence, and her mother, feeling strangely out of place, waited at the threshold of the children's bedroom. Her daughter had not even turned to look at her. Soon the little girl, whose

health evidently made up for her lack of beauty, shut her eyes and went to sleep with a sucking sound of her lips.

Then Anna turned around.

"Why, mamma, it's you?" she exclaimed. "Nu, and here I keep you standing like that." Contrite and almost blushing, Anna conducted her mother to the dining-room and, without a word, began placing fruits and cold fried chicken upon the table. Mrs. Lomoff waved them aside with a broken gesture.

"Ei-ei—child, it's not food you should give me," she moaned, and then in as few words as possible she told of Selma.

Anna listened, red spots ascending her neck, her hands pinching each other from time to time. Mrs. Lomoff saw herself at that age. Yes, Anna was very much like her.

Soon the tears began to flow down Anna's cheeks and her mother had to assume the rôle of comforter.

"Nu, Anna, don't take it on so. It will soon be over," she soothed.

A short while later, after extracting the promise that she would not come to talk to Selma, Mrs. Lomoff left for her second daughter's home, somehow cheered up by Anna's tears. At least, some one of her own blood was sharing her grief.

Pauline's house was of the marble columns, spacious courtyard, elevator and dim carpet kind. It was not as hospitable as Anna's, was Mrs. Lomoff's thought. She handed the address to the elevator girl who, with the veneered colorlessness of the retainers of the rich, took in the thin, stooping little figure with the wavering smile and timid eyes.

"Fourth floor," she said briefly. "Is Mrs. Merlin expecting you?"

Obviously the little woman did not understand. She ran her tongue along her lips and then looked about the lofty, carpeted hall and the statuettes in the corner, as if she would find help from these dumb objects. Then she placed her head a little to the left and shrugged her shoulders slightly.

Suddenly she held up the paper with one hand. "Mamma," she explained, pointing to herself with the other.

"Fourth floor," replied the girl. "This way." She had understood.

Mrs. Lomoff experienced the sinking sensation that accompanies going up in an elevator for the first time. Mirrors separated by curving gilt frames lined the car, while a curved, cushioned seat in the back lent an air of elegance to the contrivance that almost overwhelmed the little woman.

"Fourth floor," sang the colorless voice of the girl as she slid the door back. "First door to your left—room 47."

Alone, before the door, she strained her ears for the hurried steps that approached her from the other side.

The door opened and the little mother looked into her second child's eyes, the timid glance deepening into one of fright. Pauline was all dressed to go out. She wore a long fur-trimmed coat and a small beaver toque, from under which her eyes looked out at her mother in curious concentration.

It said plainly:

"Look who's here! What could have brought her anyway?"

Apologetically, her mother followed her to the library.

It was a brown room, with stacks of big, red-bound books occupying cases along the wall. Pictures of naked women with either hands or feet missing adorned the upper part of the walls. On the real mahogany table, limp leather volumes with colored ribbons hanging out from between their pages in studied nonchalance lay on each corner of the table.

Mrs. Lomoff sat down, with her eyes lowered. The whole room with its new books, new furniture and dark corners oppressed her. And her own daughter had not even unbuttoned her coat, although she had not seen her mother for almost a year.

The light, gay-hearted Pauline had changed. The stiff silence that the books maintained spread to the two. Neither could begin to talk.

"Well, mamma, how is everything?" finally began Pauline. She fumbled with a heavy purse dangling from her gloved wrist.

Her mother raised her eyes to the dark, hard ones at the other end of the real mahogany table, and told of Selma in a

hurried, breathless voice, while the hard eyes above grew harder. Suddenly Pauline rose, pressing her hands to her ears.

"Don't talk no more!" she cried out. "I have heard enough—more than enough! The sly little cat! Still water runs deep, mamma! I always said that—but my own sister! My God, what a disgrace it is to me! My God! My God!"

The little mother could not believe her ears—her Pauline was not pitying Selma, she was pitying herself.

"Why did you come to tell me this?" Pauline turned on her mother cowering in the brown leather chair. "Haven't I enough troubles of my own? Did you come for money? What else did you come for?"

For a while the little woman could say nothing. She was thinking of her little girl Pauline who had kissed her and flirted the pay envelope before her eyes before she emptied the entire contents into her lap.

"Oh, Pauline, Pauline, what has come over you? You are changed. No—I didn't come for money. I came because I was afraid you would maybe take it in your head to come and see us—and, Selma, she can't bear to have any one in the house. It would be such a big shame for her."

Pauline screwed her lips into a sneering knot.

"No, Pauline, it's not money. I came to ask you not to come to see us—"

"After what you just told me, I shouldn't go to see Selma!" scoffed the other. "Don't you think she needs a good little talk? Don't you? You're some mother! I suppose you wait on her hand and foot, and make her think she's a princess or an angel or something—"

Pauline leaned both her fists on the real mahogany table and stuck her fur-framed face before her mother's.

"No—mamma, I'm going down this minute and I'll give her a talk that she won't forget so long as she lives. Are you blind? If you make her feel that it's not her fault, what's to keep her back from doing it all over again?"

For the first time in her life the little mother forgot her timidity—forgot that she had no right to strike back—to offer defense.

"No—you won't!" she cried, raising her eyes to meet her daughter's. The pointed little face almost touched the dark, hard one. "Not while I'm alive! If you come, Pauline, I will lock the door in your face!"

How she got back to her own little home, Mrs. Lomoff never knew. But here she was, alone, trying to shut out the dull thrum of auto-wheels as they had sounded when they took her Selma away.

Never before had Mrs. Lomoff felt so much alone as in the days that followed each other with slow, relentless tread. She had gone to see Selma twice—and each time the girl had looked into her eyes with deep, penetrating curiosity. Sometimes she would break off in the middle of a weak sentence and fix the look on her mother's face. The little woman did not understand it until, during the second visit, the nurse left them alone for a moment, and Selma, with all the strength in her, reached for her mother's hands and pressed them together.

"You have not forgotten," she whispered. "Remember, you promised."

"Yeh, yeh," her mother reassured her eagerly. She patted the hot hands. "I have not forgotten, Selma."

For the remainder of the call the girl never took her eyes off the lined, pointed face, regarding her with such loving solicitude.

As Mrs. Lomoff shuffled home, she felt strangely-old and tired with a weariness that filled her very bones. She needed sleep, she thought, and as soon as she reached her rooms she went to bed, but sleep came to her only in fitful starts, leaving her more exhausted than before. Finally she got up to sit in the rocker.

Perhaps it was the chair replete with the memories of more than twenty years that caused those fitful images to come trooping before her. She could see her little Selma, her little braids carefully tied up with pieces of white tape, gravely placing a paper before her and say:

"I got a hundred pe' cent in 'rithmetic to-day."

And now her little Selma—

"Oh, God," she thought, "if I have sinned, it is me that you should punish!" She did not dare give utterance to the

words, for her piety never questioned events. Besides, her power of repression was with her even in her present distracted condition.

The image of the little girl with the braids seemed to grow and grow until it was the round, full face of Yussef Samuels, the butcher. The shocked little woman shut her eyes tightly to hide the smiling visage. Not that she did not want to see the butcher, but because she felt that she had no right to see him again. It was always a matter of right and wrong with her.

Just as suddenly a new image appeared at the other end of the room. It was a caricature of her Pauline, fur-framed and unsmiling.

The little woman in the rocker swayed back and forth, as the image shortened and widened, but still Pauline—remained. Oh, what had come over her elfin Pauline! She did not know that it was difficult for a new-comer, especially a "young nobody from the East Side," to break into West End society. And tales *will* spread until even the avenues of volunteer social work are closed to one.

"Oh, Pauline, Pauline!" the little mother moaned. Many more images sped before her frightened eyes; in some, Mrs. Lomoff recognized friends and acquaintances; in others, she recognized no one.

Finally the whole room seemed to dance with her and, bareheaded, she rushed from it, repressing the cries that rose to her throat. In the hall she felt the cold creeping up from the open street door on the floor below. She shivered, but would not turn back. There was nothing for her to do but to go down—or knock at Mrs. Singer's door. The latter she would not do—the old woman was asleep, and was very irritable when waked up suddenly.

She would go down and sit on the stoop until her head felt cooler. It was not so late—only eleven, and how comforting the stars were. Mrs. Lomoff had never before regarded the stars with any sort of emotion. All they had mean to her was the coming of night, or when they faded, the approach of morning. But to-night they were comforting. They did not flit about like those tormenting images on the wall. They were kind; they were God's own creatures.

Mrs. Lomoff shivered again and tried to rise from the stone step on which she was sitting. But a curious stiffness seemed to have bound her knees together and she sat down again, to wait for the sensation to leave her. The cold street, white with an expectant frost, echoed with the footsteps of a few stragglers who hurried by. No one saw the old woman huddled together on the stone step. But she saw every one—the girl coming home from the theater laughing into the face of the man beside her; the shawled woman who had lost her heel and was now ridiculously hopping and skipping; the little newsboy holding his leftovers close to his bosom, red-knuckled and sleepy.

And here an old man, his left hand hanging stiffly from beneath his sleeve, had stopped to talk to the policeman on the corner. Mrs. Lomoff peered anxiously at the two—the old man wore the uniform of a messenger. Pauline had once received a telegram, and the boy who had brought it had worn the same uniform. The policeman was pointing in her direction with his club. The old man said something and both laughed. And, laughing, the policeman fell in step with the messenger "boy."

The stiffness that had tied her knees together ascended steadily until it clutched the heart of the little woman on the stone step.

The uneven strides of the two men came nearer and nearer, until she could hear the policeman say:

"One thirty-two? I guess that's your number, buddy."

Here the messenger lifted the telegram nearer to his face.

"Name's Lomo—Lomoff. It's not very plain," he grumbled.

The little woman could not move. She understood enough English to know that the telegram was addressed to her—but her voice had left her. Her throat was as stiff as her knees.

"Better make sure—that's the number," the policeman said, striking a match. "Look what's here?" on seeing the little woman. "You live here? Yes? Where does Lomoff live?"

The little woman pointed to herself with an awkward motion.

"Your name's Lomoff?" The policeman raised his voice authoritatively.

Mrs. Lomoff nodded. One hand went up to her throat—the stiffness was beginning to disappear.

"Sign here." The messenger held a pencil up for her with his one hand. Mrs. Lomoff was perplexed.

"Make a cross."

Mrs. Lomoff made a cross in the corner indicated. She looked at the policeman appealingly.

"No speak English," she told him haltingly. The policeman nodded.

"That's all right," he said, "just open it. I'll read it for you."

In the end the policeman had to tear the envelope. The little woman's fingers were too stiff to bend.

He lit another match.

"It's from the Service Maternity Hospital."

"Yeh, yeh, nu?" The stiff fingers prodded his elbow—but the policeman had to light another match.

"Mother doing well—come immediately. That means come right away, understand?"

Mrs. Lomoff nodded and began to walk down the steps.

"Hold your horses," cried the policeman. "That's some distance. Better get a coat on you or something."

The eyes of the little woman were now glittering in the darkness. She turned obediently and went up-stairs. In the gloom she made her way about the house until she found her shawl and several little knitted objects tied up in tissue-paper. The policeman helped her find her car, smiling a little to himself when he saw the tissue-paper packages.

"Kids never get enough when they're born," he said to himself as the car sped by. "Looked like little pink stockings."

When Mrs. Lomoff presented herself at the door of the hospital the attendant asked her to sit down. Soon the nurse appeared. The little woman rose immediately and grasped her hands.

"Be calm," the nurse said. She said it in the way an employer says good morning to his office staff. "Just don't excite your-

self. Everything is all right. Your daughter is doing very fine after what she went through. We were afraid she wouldn't live—but she's very strong, your daughter is."

Mrs. Lomoff regarded her a little perplexed. She extended her tissue packages as the nurse stopped talking. The nurse thought it was a little present for herself and was beginning to accept deprecatingly—when a knitted bootie dropped to the floor.

"Oh!" she said. "Don't you know?"

"Know?" repeated the little woman. "Know what?"

The nurse regarded her in silence and then stroked the bent little woman's shoulder. It would be a cruel blow for her, she thought. But it was her duty to tell her.

"The baby was born dead," she said softly.

The glittering eyes closed and the stiffness left the pointed little face.

"God is good!" cried Mrs. Lomoff.

"God is good!"

(The end.)

A LIFE'S SPECULATIONS

WHEN a wee child I used to wonder why
The bright stars fell not from the bending sky,
For I no sky-line saw to hold them by.
When told of angels up beyond the blue,
I used to wonder if the winged crew
Flew races when they'd nothing else to do.

A little later, as around I played,
And saw that young girls were so frail and 'fraid,
I wondered why on earth a maid was made.
No mortal use the timid things could be
That a philosopher of six could see—
So great a mystery was the sex to me.

A few years more, when youth's expansive flame
Put my philosophy of six to shame,
A greater mystery the sex became.
Next into college I for knowledge went
And wondered at the time so vainly spent—
Four years for learning things not worth a cent!

A year of lounging in that sacred place,
Then round the world to see the human race
I wandered, and my spirit grew apace.
More than seven marvels had the world for me,
And this the greatest: why the poor should be
Slaves of the rich men when they might be free.

But having had sufficient time to cool
My fancy in this tough world's roughest school
I give up life's conundrums as a rule.
Yet such is habit—howsoe'er we try—
The other day I fell to wondering why
In Yankee taverns they serve cheese with pie.

Henry W. Austin.

Tiger

By Max Brand

Author of "The Night Horseman," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WARNING.

IN his room he found Sanford before him, and busily at work gathering up their belongings; the bureau was empty and the small pile was being sorted rapidly on the bed. As he opened the door the valet started about and presented a livid face.

"You, sir!" he sighed with relief.

"And who'd you expect?"

"I—"

"What's all this packings, Sanford?"

"Sir, the time has come for us to leave."

"The devil it has." He stepped to the valet and turned him so that the light fell full on his eyes, and he saw the dilation of the pupils. "Man, you're in a blue funk. What's up?"

"A thing which makes it impossible for us to stay here another day, sir!"

"Ah?"

"An unavoidable danger, sir!"

"Hm!" What's in the wind now? Another Larry Boynton? Another Gonzales and Hagen?"

"Gonzales? Hagen?" echoed Sanford, and he made a contemptuous gesture as though he would throw a dozen such trifles as those practised fighters out the window.

The master sat down and lighted a cigarette. Through the smoke-cloud he studied Sanford.

"You grow interesting. What is it?"

But the glance of Sanford first probed the darkness outside the windows and then rested suspiciously on the door. He stepped to the windows and pulled down the shades; he stared again into every

shadowy corner, for the single electric light, being a nearly burnt-out globe, only half illumined the apartment. Then he stepped close to Jack Lodge and whispered:

"The Baboon!"

"Don't talk like this, man," said Jack, shivering. "You make my flesh creep. What's the Baboon? Here. Sit down and smoke. You need a sedative."

Sanford took a cigarette with fingers so nervous that he could hardly hold it. Before he lighted it some sound, imperceptible to Jack, made the valet start from his chair. He sank back into it with a sigh, and lighting the cigarette he drew down half a dozen deep breaths of the smoke without a pause. The ash was a long, red-hot cinder when he began to speak, huddling his chair close to that of his master.

"A devil," he gasped. "That's the Baboon."

"What has he to do with us?"

"Everything. He sent Hagen and Gonzales and the rest after us!"

"So! Leader of a gang, eh?"

"Yes. Boynton is one of them. That's what started the Baboon after you. Then he sent these two men to-night and now that they've failed he'll stick at nothing!"

"But what the devil grudge has this crook against me?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows how the mind of that fiend works. But they say he's never failed three times to do any one thing. He's failed twice with you. The third time he won't fail."

"And how do you know he's behind this?"

"After you went out of the barroom,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 8.

Hagen came back. He looked sick. When he didn't see you, he came to me; asked me enough questions to make sure that I'm your friend, and then he told me that it was orders from the Baboon—you're to be out of the Tangle before morning."

"I am? That's news!"

Sanford shrank back in his chair, gray and aged looking.

"Sir, put some trust in me."

"I do, Sanford. A great deal. But this bogey is working on your nerves."

"Go to the police and ask them what they know of the Baboon! Don't trust what I say, but let them tell you how they've trailed this fiend back and forth across the world for a dozen years and never trapped him. Only lately they ran him down in this city, but when they almost had him the trail went out—they lost all track of him and for three weeks they've been cutting for sign. Found nothing."

"What's his specialty?"

"Anything in the world of crime."

"Versatile, eh?"

"From burglary to counterfeiting to—murder!"

He spoke the last word with such a sinister lowering of the voice that Jack instinctively jerked his head about and looked behind him. When he faced the valet again he was angry.

"Sanford, if you keep this up you'll make a woman of me."

"The best thing I can do if it will make you leave the Tangle."

"Leave under compulsion, Sanford?"

The valet looked with despair into the half-proud, half-contemptuous face of his master.

"Sir," he said, "let me tell you something about him."

"Good."

"You remember that six years ago, in London, you met Wentworth, the detective?"

"Rather, a specialist in criminal psychology."

"But also a great detective, sir. You brought him home to your rooms and I remember how he talked, sir."

"Rather. He had a reputation of running down every trail he started. I recall

wishing that I had the same power even to follow a brute beast."

"Well, sir, he had the name of never failing when he started after a criminal. That was six years ago. Now his reputation is gone."

"Eh?"

"Absolutely gone, sir. It was four years ago that the Baboon went to England and there Mr. Wentworth went after him. The trail led to Scotland, then doubled back to France, then shot to Egypt. There Wentworth lost all his clues and came back to London—his first failure."

"This Baboon is a sort of international crook, eh?"

"The world is his playground, sir."

"Well, go ahead with your story about Wentworth. Still, I can't believe he really failed. Failure was not in his vocabulary."

"Is it not in the vocabulary of the Baboon, sir, either. As I said, Wentworth came back to London. Two days later his house was looted, not upset, but simply run over with a fine-toothed comb for everything valuable in it."

"That's impossible, Sanford! Wentworth's house was so guarded that no one could break into it. He himself showed me his mechanical devices."

"Impossible to anyone except the Baboon. It was he who combed the mansion. It nearly broke the heart of Wentworth. He called in the assistance of professional detectives. They organized a campaign. For three months they hounded the Baboon. At the end of that time Mr. Wentworth gave a dinner to some members of the diplomatic service and their wives; and before the evening was over half their pockets were picked."

"Ah, the Baboon hired some one in the household for his work."

"Not at all, sir. He himself was one of the servants that evening."

"The devil!"

Sanford brightened as he saw his narrative taking effect.

"Most criminals have abandoned complicated disguises, but the Baboon is an actor as well as a criminal. He was in that house as a newly hired servant, and after

running through the pockets of half of the guests left a note for Mr. Wentworth and disappeared."

"Poor Wentworth! What did he do?"

"The cleverest thing in his entire brilliant life."

"Well? And Jack leaned forward to hear the story of the coup."

"He gave up the pursuit of the Baboon."

"The devil!" and Jack Lodge sat back with a frown.

"Consider that Wentworth was a brave man, sir."

"One of the most fearless. I saw that demonstrated."

"And an expert in criminology."

"Undoubtedly one of the greatest."

"But when he was matched with the Baboon he gave up the battle."

The master merely frowned again, blackly.

"Yet Wentworth," went on Sanford persuasively, "was on his own ground, in London, with all the powers of a great police system at his beck and call."

"That's plain."

"Even there he was helpless. The Baboon single-handed was too strong for them all."

"Seems so."

"But you, sir, are on the very stamping ground of the Baboon. This is his home. He knows every inch of The Tangle. Hardly a man here will not do his bidding either through fear or hope of a reward. Then will it be a disgrace for you to leave The Tangle?"

Jack rose and commenced to walk up and down the room.

"Not a disgrace, perhaps," he mused.

"But the more you tell me, Sanford, the more thoroughly I'm convinced that I'll have to meet the Baboon and try him out."

The valet made a gesture of despair.

"Because it irritates me, Sanford, to hear about the omniscience of this devil incarnate."

"A correct description, sir."

"Don't say that, Sanford. Because it makes me want to get at grips with the fellow."

"Only tell me what good can come to you from it, sir?"

"What good can come to me? The good of facing him and testing his strength!"

He threw out his arms and tilted up his face. Some of the same passion which had swept through him when he faced Gonzales now tingled in his blood.

"I feel a certain store of energy, Sanford, that will have to be expended."

And in his restlessness he stepped to the fireplace and stood there leaning against the mantelpiece. It was a very old building, this of the Chuck-a-Luck. Many a generation before it had been a dwelling of some fashionable family of wealth, and though long since remodeled more than once and turned into a rooming-house, it retained some of the signs of its former grandeur.

The fireplace was one of them. It was large enough for a child of ten to stand upright in the opening, and all its furnishings were massive—the andirons would have fetched a handsome price from any dealer in antiques, and the poker which leaned at one side of the hearth was a ponderous implement of tough wrought iron. Absent-mindedly Jack dropped his hand upon this poker and then raised it and looked at it curiously. He was so rapt in his thoughts, however, that he was hardly aware of what he did, and now he walked across the room again using the heavy iron as a cane.

Where the point struck the floor it left notable dints.

"Besides," said Jack, turning at the farther side of the room, "something has happened to-night which makes it impossible for me to leave the Tangle."

At this final declaration Sanford collapsed.

It was a visible change, as when the gas puffs out of a balloon and leaves it wrinkled. Jack set the poker against the wall.

"Can you explain what that thing is, sir?"

"I cannot. But even without it, I think I'd stay to meet the Baboon."

The valet was staring hopelessly at his master, but now Jack saw his eyes change,

widen. They were fixed on something behind him, and they dwelt upon it with a speechless horror.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BENDING OF THE IRON.

AT the same time that curious prickling which warns one of sudden, unseen danger, made Jack turn on his heel, and he saw, among the shadows of the door, a dark, ugly face. At first he was conscious merely of the intolerable brightness of the eyes and the savage mouth and chin, and the head seemed a horror detached from any body; but when he looked more closely, his eyes cleared and he saw a huge form—a mass of power which even in standing still suggested possibilities of fierce action. The head was smiling mirthlessly.

"A foolish resolve," said the phantom in a deep voice, "but now your wish is fulfilled."

All the heat went from the blood of Jack; some power took him by the shoulder and thrust him back and with all his soul he wished to be far away.

The smile of the Baboon turned to a grin.

"And yet," he said, and Jack noted a rather foreign intonation in the voice, "you don't seemed overpleased."

The head turned toward Sanford, and in profile Jack caught a startling resemblance between this face and one of those statues of the New Empire in Egypt, some colossus of Tothmes III or that Amenophis who placed the great figures at Luxor, with slant face from forehead to chin, and wide, narrow eyes, cruel nose, and an indefinable smile. Such was the face of the Baboon, and the swarthy skin held the unchangeable quality of a face of granite.

It was impossible to imagine this man being either young or old. He simply was. Yet Jack did not see any quality of the beast such as his grotesque name suggested. Rather there was an absence of any expression, human or otherwise, except a supernal cunning and coldness.

Under his look Sanford cringed like a slave under the whip.

"I saw you before and thought I recognized you," said the Baboon. "Have you forgotten me, Vaudrain?"

At that name, a shudder passed through the body of Sanford, but seeing the hand of the shadow stretched out toward him, he rose slowly from his chair, apparently pulled up by a force that did not exist in his own muscles, and advanced toward the door with a mechanical and measured step. A horror took the Tiger. He wanted to cry out and call Sanford back, and he felt as if he were watching a sleepwalker approach the verge of a cliff. But he could not move his lips.

Sanford stood before the shadow; his own hand went slowly out and was lost in the grip of the Baboon's fingers. There was a low moan of pain and then Sanford shrank back again toward his chair. He carried his right hand limply, at his breast, and it was white. Jack understood that the pressure of the Baboon had crushed all the blood out of those fingers, but singularly enough all his own fear was blown away by that very sight. It was not fear of actual physical danger which had chained him at first, but such horror as comes in a nightmare; and now he had concrete evidence of the Baboon and his terror vanished. He began to look at the stranger with a calmly critical eye.

"Sit down, Sanford," he said gently. "If he bothers you, turn your back on him."

Sanford waved aside the suggestion with a hasty brush of his hand and kept his intent, staring eyes upon the Baboon.

"And you," went on Tiger, "here's a chair that ought to stand your weight. Will you try it?"

The grin of the Baboon went out; for an instant he glared and then the smile returned. It seemed an habitual expression of mockery.

"I am glad to see," he remarked, "that you are not such a booby as your friend. However, I have not come to pay you a social visit."

"Good," nodded Jack. He was singularly at ease, now. His emotion was that of a chess player who sees himself in a difficult position but is determined to fight

his way out of it. He lighted another cigarette.

"Smoke?" he suggested.

"I never smoke."

"Drink?"

"I never drink."

"I thought not," said Jack. "You are one of those infallibles, it seems."

"Exactly. I was interested in your conversation with Vaudrain, and dropped in to give it a little point. You will be interested to know that what he tells you is correct. You have until the morning to leave The Tangle."

"Interesting, of course, but impossible."

"As for the girl—"

Jack started. "What are you?" he cried. "The devil?"

"As for the girl," continued the Baboon, his grin broadening to a horrible grimace, "you must forget her."

"Why so?"

"She is intended for other purposes."

"Her will is her own."

"Not at all; her will is what I wish it to be."

"Tush, tush, man. You go too far."

"And her will is that she never sees you again."

"I don't believe it."

"Ask her."

Sweat poured out on Jack's forehead.

"And now, do you go, or do you stay?"

He felt like a child struggling against a mature man; the power of omniscience surrounded him; sudden weakness possessed his arms, his hands.

"I can give you ten minutes of quiet while you make up your mind," suggested the Baboon calmly.

Red swam across the eyes of Jack.

"I'll see you in hell before I leave!"

"That's final?"

"Absolutely!"

"That ends it, then? No, I think not. In an hour I shall return and ask again for your final decision. During that time my friend Vaudrain may give you additional reason for leaving and I will add something for consideration until I come again."

So saying, he picked up the big poker and held it between his hands. At first,

Jack could not make out the significance of this motion, until he saw the shoulders of the Baboon lunge forward, the coat bulged with tensing muscles, the tall figure seemed suddenly to grow squat and clumsily bulky, the smile became a shapeless grimace with the teeth glinting through. And then the poker began to bow, slowly, steadily, not by a jerking effort but bended by a controlled exertion of strength. The ends converged, the iron creaked, crystalizing under that tremendous strain.

"This," said the giant, "may help you to a decision."

And he cast the bar of iron at the feet of Jack. Before the clangor of that fall died away, Jack raised his eyes and found that the Baboon had vanished through the door without sound.

He picked up the poker and examined it curiously. On the outside of the curve the metal showed no flaw; on the inside the outer shell, oxidised by great age, had crumpled and cracked. He strained once, twice, and again, exerting himself until his arms trembled, but the poker was not budged toward the straight. Yet by sheer power of wrist the Baboon had bent it. And Jack turned and looked gravely at Sanford.

The latter sat with much the expression of a child which has been punished and is still in danger. He watched his master with a haunted look.

"You see?" he whispered.

But Jack tossed the iron calmly upon the hearth. The crashing, clanging fall made Sanford jump in his chair, but Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems that the game is going to be worth playing, Sanford," he remarked. "And here we stay."

But it seemed that Sanford did not hear him. He sat crouching, as if he were prepared to start to his feet at the slightest alarm, and all the while his eyes went to and fro, from corner to corner, from shadow to shadow. A gust of wind flapped the drawn window-shade and he jerked his head toward it with a gasp.

"We stay," repeated Jack, cruelly, but his eyes, as he watched Sanford, were full of pity, with a mixture of awe in it.

A dozen times he had seen this man in the extreme peril of death, and never once had Sanford quailed. Death itself was not the thing he dreaded, as Jack knew. It was the manner of that death which appalled the valet. The terror of the jungle, poison underfoot and dread crouched in the branches overhead, suddenly invaded this room in the heart of the great city, for all that danger of the jungle had not moved Sanford as he was moved now.

To the last words of Jack he replied with a nod, his eyes vacant, and then moistened his white lips with the tip of his tongue. He swallowed, and put his hand to his throat as if there were a pain there.

Next, his eyes roving the room struck on the open drawer of the bureau, and in a sudden inspiration he started up and went to it. Out of the recess he drew forth an automatic. Jack turned and observed him silently, while Sanford began the work feverishly at the mechanism to take off the barrel and examine the working parts to see that all was in order, although only the day before, as Jack knew, he had been thoroughly over the weapon. For some reason he could not work the familiar gun. His fingers stumbled; suddenly he tossed the automatic upon the bed, dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TERROR.

IT was a wordless confession of helplessness, and coming from Sanford it was a grimmer tribute to the power of the Baboon than the awe of all the Tangle, or than the bending of the iron bar. Sanford, who had trusted his life a hundred times to his speed and accuracy of hand and eye and gun, now felt that even this means of defense was futile. Jack walked to him and dropped his hand upon the shoulder of the valet.

"Sanford," he said quietly.

A white, drawn face looked slowly up at him.

"Sanford," he repeated, "you'd better go."

And he stood curiously watching the bat-

tle in the eyes of the other, the tremendous effort to rise to the great occasion, and the overwhelming fear which swept over him and made his glance wander toward the door.

"I want to stay," he breathed at last.

"I know you do. I know it absolutely, Sanford. And it isn't—fear—that makes you go. Not a bit of it. You're hypnotized, that's all. Why, I remember when I was in school that I was the cock of the walk among the boys of my own age until a fellow happens along who's a trifle larger than I. It wasn't his size that bothered me, but he had a peculiar filmy eye when he got in a tight fix, and that eye haunted me. I was cock of the walk until he came, but afterwards I sulked in corners to keep out of his way. So you see, Sanford, that's what happened to you. This fellow is a bogey with you."

But Sanford refused to be comforted. He laughed hollowly, and breaking off his laughter pointed to the bent iron on the hearth.

"Bogey?" he asked.

His master shivered.

"Besides," said Sanford, "I'll wager that even if you were afraid of the boy with the film over his eyes you finally took the chance and fought him."

Jack smiled into the distance.

"It was a bloody fight, that," he nodded. "The little beggar knew how to box and he kept jamming a stiff left straight into my face every time I rushed. I was a mess after it was over with. For ten days I could hardly read a page."

He chuckled, and then recalling himself to the valet, he added kindly: "But this is different, Sanford. There's no shame to feel. It's hypnotism, I tell you."

"Fear!" answered Sanford bitterly. "I tell you I'm cold in the pit of my stomach. I know what it is! Fear; something you've never felt. I've seen you when a lion charged and I've almost prayed that you'd dodge, just to prove that you're human. But you never flinch."

"Do you know why?"

"Ah?"

"Because I was frightened every time to within an inch of my life. Because I

wanted to run, but always I was ashamed. I was afraid of my fear, old man; I was afraid that you'd see me wince. But every time that the crisis came I was sick in the pit of my stomach. That's honest."

Sanford looked at him with a sort of dumb admiration.

"And you've kept this secret all these years?" he sighed.

"Not half so well as you kept your other name.

"Vaudrain!" said Sanford with a start.

"Shall I tell you about it?"

He fixed a pleading eye upon Jack, and the latter slowly shook his head.

"I don't care what names you've gone under. Names can't change what you are. I've been through the fire with you, my friend, and I know that you're the true steel. Vaudrain? Sanford? What difference? Go home, now, and forget all about this unlucky place."

All the loyalty in his soul flared into the face of the valet, but the twisted iron on the hearth called away his glance like the eye of a serpent. Eventually he rose with a bowed head and began to pack his clothes where they lay heaped on the bed. As for Jack, he took a chair facing the window and lighted another cigarette, trying his best to appear unconcerned, but every rustle of the clothes, every creak of the leather of the suitcase made his heart fall. It was desertion, and it was desertion of the Old Guard in time of battle. He felt cold and alone in the crisis. Presently there was a silence, and when he turned he saw Sanford standing with his suitcase in his hand, staring at the floor.

"Adios, old fellow," he called. "I'll be with you again in a few days."

Sanford lifted his head; his lips moved but brought forth no words, and then he turned toward the door. Even when he had stepped outside he still fought the battle, for three separate times the door moved back and forth before it was finally closed and the latch clicked; but once the decision was taken, the footsteps hurried down the hall, almost at a running gait, turned a corner, and there was silence.

Jack turned his chair so that he was facing the wall when he sat down to wait.

There was an hour before him, or nearly an hour, before the Baboon returned for the final answer. If he refused he pictured the change on the face of this arch-fiend; and then the battle. Somehow he knew that the struggle would be without weapons, hand to hand, and then he looked toward the bended poker on the hearth and shuddered.

In the pause his senses became so abnormally acute that he heard the ticking of the clock in the next room. It gave him an odd sense of doom, as if that watch were telling the remaining seconds of his life one by one, aloud, counting off what remained to him. Once he was on the verge of going to it and burying it under a pillow, and he only checked the childish impulse by a great effort. The clock no longer reached his ears, but in its place he heard the murmur of voices from the street.

The streets were alive in the Tangle at this hour. Sometimes he caught the shrill babbling of children arguing over a game; sometimes he heard the hum of men; and once in a while there was the shrill, unhuman laughter of a woman who had been drinking. Prohibition was the law but not a fact in the Tangle.

There were odors, too, which he noted for the first time from rooms below his, where people used kitchenettes; he distinguished onions, and the keenest of all scents, frying bacon. Everywhere about him men and women went gaily ahead with their routine of living, unconscious of the horror which was about to fall upon this room in the Chuck-a-Luck. So keen did his senses become that he thought he heard a light footfall stealing up the hall.

The sweat poured out beneath his arm-pits. Where were they coming if not to his door? He strove to reason, strove to reassure himself that his was not the only door on the hall outside; but the stealthy footfall grew more audible, distinct; and then it paused. It was at his door; he could almost hear the breathing of some one crouched there to listen. Had the Baboon waited for the departure of Sanford and then come for the battle?

The door was flung open, and Sanford stepped into the room.

He looked like a man who had been through a long sickness; his step was the uncertain step of one who has newly risen from the bed of the invalid, and he was years older. But he dropped his valise, tossed his hat into a corner, and sat down by the bed.

There are ways of saying a great many things without using the eyes, and the master and the valet exchanged an eloquent conversation until Jack went to the other and held out his hand. The cold fingers of Sanford closed over it.

"I understand," said Jack, and the other said not a word.

A small event turns the tide of a great battle; the return of Sanford, while it meant no actual addition to the strength of Jack in case of trouble with the Baboon, nevertheless was a vast moral factor. From that instant he ceased to be alone. It was like the change from nightmare into calm sleep, or from sleep into wakefulness. He raised the shade of the window and looked calmly down upon the stir of people on the street. They looked small, small with distance, and small compared with the return of energy in the Tiger.

And from a passive waiting he turned suddenly into an aggressor. Instead of sitting there for the return of the Baboon he wanted to meet him at once, shatter the bogey, crush the man. He looked at his watch. There was still forty minutes before the Baboon would return, and in the meantime he had to do something. He dreaded sitting down; dreaded facing the wild eyes of Sanford during that interval, and it occurred to him that he could see Mary Dover and learn from her if it was really a fact that she wished him to leave the Tangle. The thing was impossible, of course. Even at the thought of her his hands tingled where she had touched him, and the sense of Mary as he had leaned toward her rushed over him again. Strength? He felt at that moment that he could conquer the world.

"I am going to be back in a few moments," he said to Sanford. "Wait here."

"Alone?" said Sanford, and then flushed. "Very good, sir."

And Jack went with a buoyant step to

the door, down the hall, and straight to Mary Dover's room. With his hand raised to knock he paused to gather his thoughts, muster his questions, and as he paused he heard her voice from within the room. It was pitched so low that only a pleasant murmur came to him; but the next instant he made out another sound, the roll of a man's bass voice.

Something familiar in that sound thrilled him. He stepped back from the door and looked up and down. There was not a soul in sight; there was nothing but a flicker of light from the gas jet at the corner, so Jack stepped to the end of the hall and out on the fire-escape adjoining Mary Dover's window.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET.

IT was one of those muggy spring days when there is very little stir of air, but a humid warmth makes life indoors unpleasant, and breathing is difficult, so that the step out onto the fire-escape was an almost spiritual change, like that from prison to freedom. Straight below him was a narrow alley whose pavement had been newly hosed down, and still was wet, catching one long shaft of yellow light from the street-lamp; and in a doorway stood a Chinaman dressed in American clothes except for slippers and pigtail and the long pipe at which he puffed.

All was quiet in the alley. From either end of it the noise of the streets rolled in, but came dimly up to Jack in his high position. The air of the night was gratefully cool against his face, and he turned at peace with the world toward Mary's window.

It was only by chance that he was able to look into it. The window was raised to admit as much air as possible, but a heavy curtain hung inside and the same gust which had touched the face of Tiger now pushed back this curtain, and folded it away on either side, as if the whole were done by human hands to let the stage appear. And what he saw through the triangle of the curtain was Mary Dover and

the Baboon standing face to face in the center of the room. Her back was toward him, but he saw her hand stretched out toward the giant, and she was speaking rapidly, with a touch of appeal in her manner.

As for the Baboon, Jack understood how he had gained the title, for he stood with his arms folded, his head lowered, while he peered judiciously into her face. The smile was still on his face and the mockery was now apish beyond words. All that Jack had guessed in the shadow was now patent in the full light. The skin was sallow as old parchment, drawn smooth and shiny over the high cheekbones; the jaw, thrusting out, the nose, the mouth, the glittering eyes filled him with unspeakable loathing. He would not have fought the creature hand to hand; at that moment he would have destroyed it like an unclean animal.

What Mary said he could not quite make out, for her voice was low, but when the Baboon spoke every word was distinct.

"No matter how I came, the point is that I'm here. That's plain?"

Shrinking away from him, she faced partially toward Jack. And her eyes were the eyes of Sanford, helpless with horror, fascinated. Quietly, Jack measured the distance from the fire-escape to the window. He could reach it at a stride. Another step would put him in the room, and the third movement would hurl him at the throat of the Baboon. That, in case of the last emergency, and such an emergency he half expected, for the attitude of the giant was full of nameless menace.

"You're here," she repeated.

"And you're glad to see me?"

She shivered, and the very soul of the Tiger cringed to see a man terrorize a woman in this fashion. Again he was on the verge of leaping into the room, but something kept him back, something peculiar in the tone of this strange interview, something behind it which he waited to discover. The wind was freshening.

"Come here. Don't make a baby face at me. Come here, I say."

She came closer, but in so doing she placed the table between herself and the

Baboon and rested her hands on the edge of it.

"Sit down!"

As though she dared not take her eyes off him, she reached behind her, found a chair, and obeyed.

"Am I a ghost? Smile, damn it!"

Her lips twitched obediently and then were grave again.

"That's better. He nodded. "I'm fond of you, Mary, when you don't make a fool of yourself. That's what you've been doing lately."

He started around the table and she moved as if to rise.

"Sit still!"

She shrank again, far back into the chair, and he took his place, sitting on the edge of the table, his arms still folded.

"Who's this new man?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Bah! You know who I mean. The Tiger, they call him."

"I don't know who he is."

"Who brought him here?"

"He just came."

The Baboon shook with soundless laughter. He waited until the laughter was quite ended and remained there for a moment glaring at the girl.

"You lie; you brought him here."

"No."

"What's he doing?"

"He's the bouncer in Larry Boynton's place."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"But it's enough. What d'ye mean by turning out Larry?"

A spark of energy made her sit straighter.

"That's nothing to do with you."

"It hasn't? I ask you: is Larry a friend of mine?"

"Yes."

"Is Tiger a friend of mine?"

"He doesn't know you."

He glowered on her. "That's reason enough for keeping Boynton, isn't it? He's a friend of mine and Tiger isn't. Do you want more reason than that?"

But Mary Dover leaned weakly in her chair and stared helplessly at the monster,

It seemed to the Tiger that he could see and feel an almost physical bond which tied her to the giant who sat sneering above her.

Finally she said: "But Tiger's a friend of mine."

The Baboon chuckled, but his laughter stopped short.

"What the hell is that to me? A friend of yours? I ask you, what the hell is that to me?"

"Nothing," whispered Mary Dover, and again a sick horror weakened the Tiger.

"What's between them?" he whispered to himself. "What's between them?"

The Baboon had suddenly leaned close to Mary Dover, as though a new thought stirred him.

"What's the Tiger to *you*?"

"Nothing."

A great, sallow hand shot out, and the tips of iron fingers beneath her chin pushed back her face until she was looking squarely into the eyes of the Baboon. The Tiger could see her shrink. He watched her tremble; and he marked how her glances fluttered from one side to another, but finally rested steadily on the eyes of the man; and then, and only then, a smile of cruel pleasure, of confident mastery, stretched the lips of the Baboon.

"Say it again!"

Her lips moved, but if there was a sound, it did not carry to the Tiger; yet he knew that she had denied him twice.

"Louder," sneered the Baboon, "because if you lie loud enough I may believe you."

Suddenly she struck down his hand. She was sitting bolt-erect in her chair and her eyes burned like black diamonds in the pallor of her face.

"He's my friend!" she cried fiercely. "D'you hear that? Is that what you want to know? He's my friend! Thank God!"

"Hell!" snarled the Baboon, but then put an evident great effort forth and controlled himself. He folded his arms, powerfully, as though he did not dare to trust his hands if they were free to move at will. "Your friend?"

She was silent. That outburst had cost

her dear, and now she sat with one hand pressed against her breast.

Then the spur of a new idea made the Baboon start and lean over her again.

"How long have you known him?"

"About eight or ten hours."

"What?" Some of the fierceness went out of the giant's face, but he still watched her shrewdly.

It seemed to the Tiger that he would go mad with confusion of mind. Obviously the girl dreaded this fellow like a snake; but if she feared him, why did she not raise her voice? A single call would bring half the Tangle to the room, ready for battle, and no matter how terrible the Baboon might be, if she appealed to the mob they would tear the monster to bits. She had only to cry out; she had only to lift a finger, and in spite of all his power the Baboon would be crushed. But the idea of resistance never seemed to occur to her, and it was this fact that made the Tiger crouch outside the window in the darkness, setting his teeth over a groan.

"Only ten hours," repeated the Baboon suspiciously. "And yet you're friends?"

"Yes."

"What's in him?"

"He's clean, and he's got an eye as straight as a ruled line!"

"Both things that I lack, eh?"

She winced away from him.

"Not that. But he's different."

The Baboon still kept his gloomily alert glance upon her.

"Tell me this," he said suddenly. "You remember when I started off on my last trip?"

"Yes."

"I asked you to go along."

The heart of the Tiger stopped beating.

"Yes."

"And you wouldn't go?"

The heart of the Tiger resumed its pulses.

"No."

"You said it was because you wanted to stay straight. Well, there was another reason. Look me in the eye! There was another reason. You wanted to get me out of the way so's you could meet this—Tiger! What?"

His great arms tugged at each other as if they, independently of the man, were trying to tear themselves loose and get at her throat.

"I never saw him before to-day," she stammered. "I'll swear it!"

"Swear it, then!"

She lifted her hand.

"Stop it!" he cried suddenly, and struck the hand down. "Always did give me the creeps to hear an oath." He went on more kindly: "You know I've never been against letting you have friends."

She nodded. And again the Tiger searched his brain in mad confusion. What right had this monster to dictate what the girl should have. There was only one possible explanation, and this the Tiger shut out of his sick brain.

"You've had a pal in every guy in the Tangle; and I've never said a word."

She nodded.

"But the Tiger is different. I don't like him. That's all."

"What do you want me to do?" she whispered.

"Send him away."

"I've asked him to go."

"What!"

"I've asked him to go. Honest!"

"And he wouldn't budge?"

She shook her head.

"Why d'you stop at asking? Since when have you started asking? What about Soapy Smith? Did you ask him to go? No, you had him thrown out? Why don't you have the Tiger tossed out on his ear?"

She did not answer.

"D'you hear me!" shouted the Baboon, his fury strangling the words. "Why don't you?"

"The boys don't like to mix with him."

"By God!" snarled the Baboon. "Is that it?" Then you leave it to me. I'll have him out of here before morning!"

She started up; she caught at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess?" grinned the giant.

She stepped away with her hands gripped at her sides.

"If you lay a fingerweight on him I'll never forgive you."

The Baboon considered her with a sort of surprised admiration.

"I see you've a spark of the old stuff in you," he nodded. "Just a spark. That's what I used to like about you. Remember?"

The vague horror beat like a pair of shadowy bat-wings at the mind of the Tiger, but he threw the suspicion aside.

"But spark or no spark," said the Baboon, "you'll do what I say. Give me the key to your room."

"To lock me in while you—no, no, no!"

"None of that! Tears? Hell, d'you think they matter with me? Give me the key!"

"For God's sake!"

The hand which the Baboon had held out toward her suddenly gripped her shoulder.

"What do you mean by that?"

The Tiger saw her hands move to the shoulders of the Baboon, and then—horror, horror!—those slender fingers slipped around the brute neck.

"He's my friend. He's played straight and clean. Oh, for the sake of the old days—"

All sight was lost to the Tiger; all hearing was blotted away. It was true. She had belonged to this man—the Baboon. She had lived with him!

His mind cleared again and he heard: "If I thought he was more than a friend to you, Mary, I'd—but let that go. Here!"

And the Tiger saw the Baboon, holding both the wrists of the girl easily, reach into the pocket of her dress and take out a bundle of keys.

"I'm going to lock you in for safety; but if you make a fool of yourself and try to raise the Chuck-a-Luck, I'll finish him. Hear?"

"Give me one second," she pleaded desperately, "before you—"

"Bah!"

And with a gesture, he flung her away so violently that striking the edge of the table she reeled and crumpled to the floor. She made no effort to rise, but lay with her face buried in her arms, and the masses of black hair, loosened, falling like a pool of shadow around her head.

Above her stood the Baboon, sneering, and at the sight of his face the Tiger felt the old blood-madness rush across his eyes. In the very act of leaping toward the window he caught himself back with an agony of effort.

"She belongs to him," gasped Tiger. "And I haven't the right. God! I haven't the right!"

With an effort he retreated from the fire-escape and stood in the hall beating his face in a spasm of impotence. Mechanically, he knew he was walking; he opened a door and stood in his room; Sanford leaped up to greet him.

"You've met him!" cried the valet.

"I?"

"The Baboon. I can see it in your face!"

He passed his hand slowly across his forehead, and by a tremendous effort of will that left him weak, he made his features calm.

"You've unpacked our things, Sanford?"

"Yes, sir."

"Put them together again; we're leaving at once."

The valet was by no means a man given to shows of emotion, but now he raised both his hands, palm uppermost.

"Thank God," he breathed.

"Thank the devil," said the Tiger, "he's the only one who has a part in this!"

CHAPTER XXI.

SMOKE.

MANY a minute had passed, and still Mary Dover did not stir from her place on the floor, neither lifted her head nor moved her arms; and presently she heard the door opened, and a soft, heavy footfall whose weight made the flooring tremble came close and stood at her side.

"The hour was up when I went to his room, said the Baboon.

With both her arms she made a perfect night before her eyes.

"He was not there," went on the giant, and paused as if to allow her to comment.

"After all," said the Baboon, laughing

softly," he turned out to be discreet, this Tiger of yours. He ran away before his time was up."

She whirled from that prone position to her feet with catlike speed.

"You lie!" she cried. "He didn't run!"

The Baboon said nothing, but his grin was eloquent. He gestured toward the door as though inviting her to go and explore for herself, and she ran past him and swiftly down the hall. Her running step was hardly louder than the fall of shadows, but the vast bulk of the Baboon gliding behind her made hardly more sound; and when she whisked through the door of Tiger's room, panting, the Baboon with his smile slipped quietly in behind her. There was no Tiger in sight, and the drawers of the bureau stood eloquently open!

And the girl stood bewildered, one hand pressed against her cheek, while the Baboon watched her with sinister content.

"Sit down and bawl," he advised.

"You've lost your toy. Sit down and cry it out."

She stood at the table idly fingering a half empty, open cigarette box of the Tiger's, which Sanford in his haste had left behind.

"There's nothing more that you can do," she said.

"Perhaps not."

"Then leave me alone."

He chuckled: "With your dead?" but the girl gave a strangled cry and slipped her hand into her dress. It came out bearing a delicate sliver of steel, very bright, very slender—a stiletto with a hilt hardly the breadth of two fingers in length, and a blade running to so fine a point that it was like a ray of light. A thumb's pressure could drive that incredible blade up to the hilt through solid flesh. She held the little weapon in the palm of her raised hand.

"Get out!" she commanded. "Get out, or I'll shoot this through your rotten heart. Get out!"

Her hand waved; she made a step forward; and the Baboon, letting his smile stretch to a grin of malice, slid backward to the door and disappeared.

Alone in the room, she put away the dagger and looked about her. A soiled collar

lay at one side of the bureau on the floor; there was a necktie near the foot of the bed—everything pointed to a hurried departure—a flight! Every detail meant fear, and the thought sickened her, for in her standards there was one great requisite which compensated for a thousand vices, and whose absence damned a thousand virtues; it was courage.

She had learned to respect a thief if he were brave, and sympathize with the cold nerves of the murderer. And against this background she pictured the Tiger sitting, perhaps, in that chair in the corner, and waiting for the return of the Baboon, and growing pale, and his forehead shining with sweat. She recalled how Gonzales had crumbled beneath the eye of Tiger that very evening. Perhaps Tiger himself had crumbled in the same manner before the terrible thought of the Baboon. It bowed her head.

Suddenly her face raised, and she cried softly: "He'll come back. I know he'll come back!"

It was her confession of faith, and merely saying the words comforted her, gave her strength. From the box of his cigarettes she selected one, and sitting in the big chair opposite the window she lighted it.

She puffed the spiralling clouds of smoke, and now the mist changed into forms, figures. There was a swirl of struggling shapes, hands raised, faces convulsed; it was the fight in the Chuck-a-Luck. The crowd disappeared and in its place was the Tiger alone, with the massive shoulders of Larry Boynton opposite, and she saw the Tiger leap. Again this picture dissolved into thin air, and with the third breath of mounting smoke she saw only one thing, the face of the Tiger as he had leaned above her in the little office.

But the Tiger was finding one great ally which helped him to forget the Tangle, and that ally was the cleanliness of his own section of the city. They took a taxi and skirted along the Park, just beginning to change from the browns and blacks of winter blossom. The tires whisked soothingly over the wet pavements, and through the window there blew an air straight from

those fresh, growing things of the Park. The Tiger leaned back against the cushions and closed his eyes; by the sense of smell alone he could draw every detail of the picture, and when he opened his eyes and saw the house of his father beside him, all the events of that day disappeared into a dream-quality. Half an hour later he was asleep in his own bed, and he did not stir when Sanford tiptoed into the room, leaned to examine his master in the dark, and then softly raised the window a little for fear the wind might blow cold during the night.

He went back to his own room shaking his head gloomily, but Sanford failed to take heed of one important factor, and that was the cruel ability of a healthy man to forget. Give a man sleep, good food, and an opportunity to exercise, and nine chances out of ten he will slough off both care and sorrow.

Therefore, although Sanford himself came out the next morning with a haggard face, his master was as fresh and smiling as though he had just slept the clock round. And his first commission to the valet was an order to go to the gunsmith in the Tangle and get the heavy rifle he had started for the day before.

He breakfasted alone in his room, for he wished to be alone to enjoy the deep-seated feeling of escape which possessed him; as if he had been snatched from a whirlpool at the very moment when he was about to be drawn down into the water. All things strengthened him in that emotion—the thick rug, which gave beneath his slippered feet, the loose comfort of the dressing robe, the translucent white service on which breakfast was served to him. The voices which spoke were as guarded as the sounds of a sick-room; the doors opened and closed with the softest clicks, as though an oiled mechanism controlled them.

His was not a calloused nature, but if he thought of Mary Dover it was as a horror now safely behind him. He remembered once how he had taken her hands and made love to her, and he shuddered at the thought. She had loved another man; she had belonged to another man; her own words assured him of that, and he felt for her in addition to that horror a sort of grim

pity. Doubtless she had been raised without a moral standard, and those frank, clear eyes of hers knew things which would blacken the very soul of one of the girls in his set. Sometimes he paused during his breakfast to think of her. She was a mystery; lovely, indeed, beyond anything that he knew of women; but the horror stood side by side with her. Indeed, to speak the truth, eight hours of sound sleep washed nine-tenths of the Tangle out of his mind.

When he was dressed he saw his mother. She herself had barely finished breakfasting and she sat by a window of her room with a great vase of flowers beside her. The green leaves and the bright blossoms framed her face, made the silver of her hair more brilliant, and with the slant sunlight upon her she looked to Jack Lodge as pure and as bright as a saint. Back in his mind the shadow of the Tangle still lay, and silently he thanked God for such a mother. As for Mrs. Lodge, she saw his smile, saw his glance turn inward, and she knew that this was her day of authority over her son.

"You've postponed your shooting trip?" she asked.

"Only for a day or two. I'm about to ring up Darling and tell him to rush things along."

"Then," she said firmly, "I am going to take absolute possession of you to-day. Do you mind?"

He chuckled at her determination.

"For how long?"

"Well, say until midnight."

"If you have control as long as that, do you know what will happen?"

"Well?"

"I'll be on the way to a marriage."

"How much would you object to that?"

"As a matter of fact," said Jack, "if a man tries to handle his own affairs of the heart, he does about as well as a sleep-walker. I've a good mind to turn the whole matter over to you. At least, you'd keep me from breaking my neck."

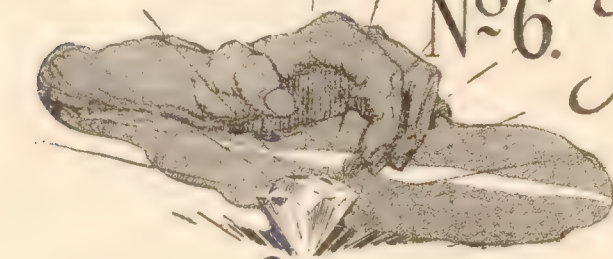
"My dear," murmured Mrs. Lodge, "what in the world has happened to you in the last twenty-four hours? You've grown up!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Policy Sleuth

Nº 6. The Star
of the
World

by Edgar Wallace



MR. DOUGLAS CAMPBELL, that eminent man of affairs, looked twice at a written slip which lay on his desk, and grunted. It was Bob Brewer's expense account, and the frugal

soul of Mr. Campbell was seared within him. It is true that the expenses were incurred while Bob Brewer was engaged in saving the company tens of thousands of pounds and a penny in every pound saved

would have been sufficient to cover the expenses and provide a handsome surplus.

But Mr. Campbell did not look at things this way, and when Bob Brewer went into the office he was met by sad eyes and a shaking head.

"Man, Brewer, you are eating up the dividends of this company," said Mr. Campbell soberly.

"By rights there shouldn't be any dividends," rejoined Bob. "Conducted and managed as this insurance company is conducted and managed, it should be in the hands of the official receiver if it weren't for me. I'll bet there isn't another company in the city that has as many crooks on its books as you have! There isn't a professional jewelry loser who isn't insured up to his neck."

"I am not asking for your advice as to how to conduct this business," said Mr. Campbell with acerbity.

"No, you are merely telling me how I must conduct mine," quoth Bob, sitting on the edge of the desk and glancing down at the slip of paper before the president. "When you talk as you do now I know you have a piece of work for me which will involve the spending of a great deal of money. You need have no fear. For this commission, fill in a blank check and trust to my sense of decency."

Mr. Campbell locked away the papers in his desk before he replied.

"Lord Yarrowby—" he began.

Bob jumped to his feet.

"You don't mean to say," he said in an awe-stricken voice, "that you have had the temerity to insure the Yarrowby diamond?"

Mr. Campbell looked at him uncomfortably.

"Why not?" he challenged. "It is good business. We only take the risk for a few days, between the time of its arriving at Southampton and its presentation to the nation."

"A few days too long," said Bob Brewer briskly. "I was scared all the time that you would take that risk. Why, the whole of the Big Four are after that stone—Tommy Waters, Reddy, the Hoy Brothers—the whole of the world—the crooked

world, is waiting for the Yarrowby diamond!"

A great deal of space in the newspaper world had been devoted to the Yarrowby diamond, its size, weight, and brilliance; its romantic discovery in the Yarrowby mine, by Lord Yarrowby himself, when, in turning over a piece of blue clay with his walking-stick he had discovered this incomparable gem. The story of its presentation to the nation had been told and retold until the Yarrowby diamond had become a household word.

It had been cut and polished in South Africa. One of the first great stones to be so treated, its arrival had been awaited not only by connoisseur but by the general public with interest, which, if it was not breathless, was, at any rate, sincere.

"Well, anyway," said Mr. Campbell, "I have taken the risk, and you will go down to Southampton to-night to meet the Manderic which arrives to-morrow at daybreak. Remember, we are only responsible from the moment the package crosses the gangway until the stone arrives in the hands of the king's minister."

"May I ask the amount of our risk?" inquired Bob politely.

"Two hundred thousand pounds," replied Mr. Campbell with irritation. "Man, with your gloomy face, you make me nervous! Now, off you go to Southampton; the fare is—"

"Never mind about the fare," broke in Bob. "It may be that I'll go down by aeroplane and possibly by motor-car. You can be sure I shall take the most expensive route and possibly I shall hire a whole floor of the Southwestern Hotel."

"It should be no bother to you," said Mr. Campbell pointedly. "Two real detectives will accompany it all the way from South Africa."

But Bob was too genuinely worried to make any adequate retort.

He spoke no more than the truth when he said that the country was humming at that moment with crookdom. He was very well informed on the movements of the illegal fraternity and he knew that scarcely a mail-boat arrived that had not deposited somebody whose arrival had been well ad-

vised by the New York or Continental police. And he sensed rather than knew that the object of these visitations was the Yarrowby diamond.

What made the matter all the more worrying to him was the light-hearted way in which the police had accepted the news of the coming of this gem. They were so supremely confident, so sure of their flat-footed methods of securing the stone, that Mr. Bob Brewer felt like weeping.

He went down to Southampton, not as he had promised by aeroplane or any other fantastic method of transportation, but on a very matter-of-fact train. He interviewed the local chief of police, who immediately and emphatically declaimed any responsibility for diamonds great or small, unless the said jewels were taken outside the boundaries to the docks, "within which my jurisdiction does not run," quoth he triumphantly.

"The fact is," said the exasperated Bob, "do you know anything about the arrangements that are being made to prevent this large mass of mineral falling into illegal or unauthorized hands?"

The policeman was a man of good humor.

"Unofficially I know a lot," he said cautiously. "Don't think that the dock police are worried! Heavens, no! If the thing is lost, its value is covered by a fool insurance company. Did you know that by the way?"

"I know it," said Bob grimly, "I represent that asinine association and I am not inclined to give you the lie about its intelligence—proceed."

The diamond, according to the dock police, was being brought over in a special case in Lord Yarrowby's own stateroom and was guarded night and day, Lord Yarrowby himself sleeping within reach of the safe door while there was a guard at the door of the cabin and another in the alleyway. In addition were the two men from Scotland Yard who had been specially sent over to keep a vigilant eye on the general events.

The Castle boat did not put into Southampton until seven o'clock the next morning and one of the first of the visitors aboard was Bob.

He sought out Lord Yarrowby and sent down his card.

In the eccentric nobleman's stateroom there were already occupants—two men, probably the detectives, the ship's purser, Lord Yarrowby himself, together with his valet.

It was at the valet that Bob stared, and well he might, for the man was stripped to his waist and his self-conscious grin indicated that he himself was not unconscious of the absurdity of his position.

Lord Yarrowby, a tall, alert man, saw Bob's amazement with a gleam of amusement in his eyes. He took the detective's card and nodded.

"Yes, I was expecting you," he said, "this ill-clad person," he waved his hand, "is my valet, and he is in that condition because I never allow anybody to touch the diamond unless they are so costumed that it is impossible for them to play monkey tricks upon me. Look at this."

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a red stone.

This he handed to Bob with a smile, and the detective looked at it curiously. It was very light and was evidently made of dried clay, a sort of terra-cotta.

"What is the exact significance of this interesting souvenir?" asked Bob as he handed it back to its lordly owner.

The great man only laughed.

"I have had three of those since the voyage started, left in my cabin by some person or persons unknown," he said, "together with a little slip of paper, on which was inscribed the words: 'The quickness of the hand deceives the eye.' I don't trust Louis any farther than I can see him," with a nod to his valet, "I don't trust anybody, to be exact, and I'm following the rule which I have established since this diamond was cut, namely, that anybody who handles it must be so attired that he cannot play tricks. You, I understand, are the insurance agent—"

"Detective," corrected Bob.

"Very good. Then I am going to show you the jewel of great price."

There was a safe clamped to the wall of the cabin, and this the old man opened, taking out a steel box, which he placed on

the table, at the end of which stood the valet.

"Louis will take it out. I don't even trust myself," laughed his lordship as he unlocked the box, and stood back.

The valet threw back the lid almost reverently, and lifted out a mass of wadding. This he laid on the table, and Bob saw something big and knobby, tied in a square of blue silk, which the Swiss deftly unknotted, revealing to the amazed eyes of those assembled in the cabin, that most gorgeous jewel which had been named, not unreasonably, "Star of the World."

Bob gasped as his lordship lifted the diamond and handed it to him.

"You are holding a king's fortune in your hand."

"For heaven's sake, take it back!" cried Bob hastily. "The thing dazzles and fascinates me."

The valet had replaced the wadding in the box, and methodically laid on top the blue square of silk.

"You see that diamond? You observe it being put back in the box? You will also see it placed in the trunk and upon the train," said Lord Yarrowby.

The diamond had been passed back to Louis and he was busy retying it. From where he stood Bob could not see his operations very clearly, and walked along till he stood over the valet, who had already fastened the blue silk, drew over the protecting layer of cotton wool, dropped the lid gently, and stood back with extended arms and outstretched fingers.

"Turn round, Louis."

The man swung round, showing his back. Now Bob saw that, save for a pair of bathing-drawers, the man was quite nude.

"You may think this method rather fantastic," said his lordship, "but I've been used to dealing with negroes who can palm nine-carat diamonds between their fingers, and what a negro can do a white man can do, eh, Louis?"

The Swiss smiled again.

"*Oui, mitor*," he answered.

His lordship locked the box, replaced it in the safe, and snapped the three locks of the safe door.

"And now, gentlemen," said his lordship,

"I have a surprise for you, a very pleasant surprise, I think it will prove to you, Mr. Brewer, as you are representing the insurance company. This safe will be taken onto the guard's van and will be watched by ten armed men from now onward. Each of those men has been nominated by old friends of mine, commanding battalions at present in England. They are all soldiers, all non-commissioned officers, all men above suspicion. I made the arrangement by wireless, and I expect the guard will be on board in a few minutes."

Bob remembered having seen a miscellaneous collection of soldiers standing on the quay, and a few minutes later he was to meet them. They came, marching with military precision, into the cabin, and they were all everything that Lord Yarrowby had claimed. Hard-faced men, without a smile among them, who took their responsibilities with the greatest seriousness.

Bob watched the transfer of the safe to the train, where it was placed on the specially constructed shelf in the guard's van. Then he drew Lord Yarrowby aside.

"I want to ask a few questions if you don't mind answering them?"

"Ask anything you like," said his genial lordship.

"It is mainly about Louis," pursued Bob, "who, unless I have been greatly mistaken, is a paid agent of the Big Four."

Lord Yarrowby lifted his eyebrows.

"What makes you think that?" and then quickly: "Did you see him take out—"

"I saw him take nothing. The diamond is in your safe where he put it. I repeat that he is the agent of the Four, or one of the members of the Four. You must know, Lord Yarrowby, that there is in Europe four separate and distinct gangs of big men. They generally work independently of one another, but on great occasions they combine for mutual benefit. Whether your valet is one of the agents of the Four in combination or of an individual gang, I am unable to tell you. I merely assert that he has been squared."

Lord Yarrowby thrust his hands in his trouser's pockets and scowled at Bob, not unpleasantly, as he hastened to explain.

"I am not doubting your word, only I am puzzled how you made the discovery."

"I made it this morning," said Bob.

"You know my man?"

"I have never seen him before in my life," smiled the other, "but let me show you something."

He put his hand in his pocket and took out half a crown and held it up by his finger-tips, then slowly and in full view of his "audience" laid it on the palm of his hand and as slowly closed his fist.

"Is that half-crown there?" he asked.

"I'd like to bet on it," said Lord Yarrowby.

"Agreed," said Bob, and opened his hand, which was empty.

"It is a simple trick," Bob went on. "I only did it to show you that in my extreme youth I practised that sort of thing and practise not only enables you to perform those tricks, but it also helps you to detect them in others."

"You mean—" began his lordship.

"I tell you the diamond is in the safe, and you may accept my assurance on it, but—"

"Bosh!" exclaimed Lord Yarrowby impatiently. "My dear chap, you are working on your imagination. Louis has been with me for five years, his name is Heltz, a native of Rolle in the canton of Vaud."

"What do you pay him a week?" asked Bob.

"I pay him well—a hundred a year."

Bob laughed scornfully.

"A hundred a year never kept any man faithful," he said. "Still, I am not worrying about the diamond now, for if it disappears I know just where I can find it."

Lord Yarrowby looked at him and a little smile creased his eyes, then he laughed.

"I like the look of you," he said; "if I didn't I should say you were a *poseur*. Now let us go to our breakfast!"

Bob had a cheerful journey to town for half or more than half his worry had disappeared. As the train was nearing London, Lord Yarrowby came along and sat in Bob's compartment.

"Look here," he said, "I am inclined to agree with you up to this point, that I won't

allow Louis within a hundred yards of that case again."

"You may do as you wish about that, but I don't suppose he will want to go near it," responded Bob. "In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't bolt the moment he gets to London!"

"Without the stone?" asked his lordship incredulously.

"Without the stone," said Bob.

He was thoughtful for a while, then he asked:

"Those little red stones that were put in your cabin, can I have one?"

"Certainly; I have them in my bag. I will bring one along to you."

He went through to his compartment and returned presently with the little terra-cotta mass. Bob weighed it carefully in his hand.

"I had a suspicion," said Lord Yarrowby, "that it was sent in bravado by somebody or other on the boat, who intended getting away with the diamond and leaving one of these in its place, but what he would have benefited by warning me, I fail to see."

"He might have benefited a lot," answered Bob with a smile.

"But what would be the object in leaving the stone, anyway?" asked the puzzled magnate.

"The Big Four have their funny little ways," said Bob vaguely and pocketed the red stone.

He sought Douglas Campbell's office and reported his arrival.

"Good heavens, what are you doing here?" demanded that agitated man. "Don't you understand that I want you to watch that safe day and night and never to leave it?"

"I am a human being in need of a certain amount of sleep," said Bob. "Besides, the diamond is all right."

And to prove how right it was, he sat down and related the story that Lord Yarrowby had told. He had hardly finished his narrative before Mr. Campbell was bordering upon hysteria.

"Then they are after it, they are after it!" he wailed. "For heaven's sake go, Bob, and don't lose sight of the stone."

"The safe is in the vaults of the Bank of

England," smiled Bob. "I doubt whether they'll admit me, even on your card; anyway, you needn't bother. On Tuesday Yarrowby is taking it to the Colonial office, where the diamond will be handed over with musical accompaniment, toasts of champagne and innumerable shoutings and speeches."

On the Tuesday morning, Bob received a telephone message from Lord Yarrowby, and at once the voice of his lordship revealed anxiety.

"I say that infernal valet of mine hasn't been home all night!"

"The virtuous Louis?" exclaimed Bob with much surprise.

"The virtuous Louis," was the reply. "He was seen at Charing Cross Station last night."

"He'll be seen in his native cantonment yodling among the hills to-morrow," said Bob easily. "Perhaps he'll buy a hotel with his gains—"

"Do you think he has the stone—"

"I'm sure he hasn't," said Bob. "Calm your mind, Lord Yarrowby. I shouldn't be sitting here in my pajamas discussing society gossip and items of criminal intelligence if I thought that the stone had gone."

He heard a grunt then:

"The presentation is taking place at eleven o'clock. I want you to be there."

"I shall be there whether you want me or not," said Bob, and he heard a little chuckle at the other end of the wire.

He accompanied the safe from Threadneedle Street to Whitehall and was one of the select few who stood near Lord Yarrowby after his little speech. There followed a speech by the minister about industry and patriotism, then Lord Yarrowby opened the safe door and drew forth the smaller box containing the treasure. This he also opened, not without a certain display of nervousness, removed the cotton-wool which covered the little blue bundle and, with fingers that shook somewhat, untied the knot which the dexterous Louis had fastened.

And then he stepped back with a hoarse cry, for no diamond was visible!

In its place was an irregular red stone,

which he lifted, gazing upon it with wide-open, unbelieving eyes.

"It is gone!" he cried in a strangled voice. "Great Heaven, he took it!"

Bob heard a low moan near him and looked round to catch the eye of the pallid Mr. Campbell, who had been invited to the ceremony.

Lord Yarrowby swung round upon Bob and he was no longer the genial person whom the detective had met in the cabin.

"You are responsible for this," he said. "You told me that the diamond was there! If you thought Louis had taken it, you should have had him arrested!"

One of the ministers came forward.

"Do you mean to say that the stone has been stolen?" he demanded incredulously.

Yarrowby had no words; he could only nod his head.

The silence which followed was almost unnerving. Lord Yarrowby's eyes fixed Bob.

"What have you to say?" he asked.

Bob was scratching his chin thoughtfully.

"I can only say that when the safe left the ship the diamond was intact."

"It is a very serious matter for you," went on Yarrowby, recovering himself.

"The stone was insured then?" asked a minister.

"For two hundred thousand pounds," answered the grim Lord Yarrowby.

Campbell licked his dry lips.

"The money will be paid if the stone is not recovered," he said, not without dignity.

"If Mr. Brewer says the stone was in the safe when it came ashore, I have every confidence that he spoke the truth. We have to find out who had access to the safe since it has been in England."

"Nobody," said Lord Yarrowby.

"In the mean time," added Bob, "I will take this."

He picked up the terra-cotta rock from its bed of cotton-wool, and compared it with another stone that he had taken from his pocket. He then accompanied Campbell down the stairs into Whitehall.

No word did they speak till they reached the office.

"This is a mighty serious business,"

breathed Campbell as he flopped in his chair.

"Take care of that," said Bob, and handed a red stone to the other. "Put it in the safe; I am going out to make a few investigations. And keep calm!"

His investigations took him to Scotland Yard, at which building his stay was short. He did not return to the office until three o'clock, to find Mr. Campbell in a condition bordering on frenzy.

"I have been telephoning for you all over the place, Brewer," he said. "Where have you been?"

"Loafing round," rejoined Bob easily.

"Scotland Yard has sent for the stone."

"I know," he said. "They sent a man over with a written order and, of course, you gave it to him; in fact, I know you did."

"Shouldn't I?" asked Mr. Campbell.

"No harm was done," said Bob. "The intelligent officer who brought that order is known in real life as Bill Hoy. He is the biggest man of the Big Four—also the order was forged and did not come from Scotland Yard at all."

Mr. Campbell gasped.

"Don't worry," said Bob. "He was pinched as he came out of the office; in fact, we were waiting for him to call—ah, here is Lord Yarrowby!"

Yarrowby came in at that moment and, with him, an official from the Colonial office.

To say "he came in" is rather inaccurate; he burst into the room like a whirlwind.

"What's this!" he demanded excitedly. "Is it true?"

"Perfectly true," said Bob. "We caught the gentleman who worked the oracle, Mr. William Hoy, as eminent a thief as you are likely to meet in your lifetime."

Bob took from his pocket a red stone.

"That which Mr. Hoy called for, and which I gave into Mr. Campbell's care, knowing that it would be called for, was one received by his lordship during the voyage."

"This," and he held the stone in his hand, "is the fellow that Lord Yarrowby found in the jewel-case."

Somebody brought him a glass of water and he slowly immersed the stone therein. Instantly the water was colored red.

"You see, it is almost like clay; in fact, it is clay and very porous," explained Bob and waited. Presently: "I think it has been in the water long enough."

He lifted it out and laid it upon a paper with his fingers, pushing aside the stodgy mass.

Suddenly Lord Yarrowby let out a yell.

"The diamond!" he roared.

"The diamond," said Bob calmly, "simply covered with a wrapping of clay by your clever Louis with great dexterity and a piece of oil-paper laid on the cotton-wool, while we were examining the diamond in the cabin. When you handed it back, he covered the diamond with a layer of damp clay. So quickly was it done and so rapidly did he tie it with its silk, that you did not realize that all the time he was pinching through the silk to mold it to the diamond's shape. When it dried, as it would in a few hours, it would resemble one of those pieces of dried clay which were left in your cabin, with no other idea than to suggest to you that an attempt was to be made to substitute something of this sort for the 'Star of the World.'"

"But how could they hope to get hold of the stone?"

Bob laughed.

"It is easier to burgle the safe in an insurance office than a safe in the Bank of England," he said significantly, "and, anyway, they didn't depend on burglary, did they, Mr. Campbell?"

Douglas Campbell shifted uneasily in his chair.

"The order from Scotland Yard certainly looked right enough," he replied, "otherwise I wouldn't have handed over the stone."

"Well, you didn't hand it over," said Bob, "so why worry?"

Listening Eyes

by Bertram Lebhar

Author of "Thumbs Down," "A Nurse Named Allenby," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

A MARKED MAN.

THERE was a frown of perplexity on the smooth-shaven countenance of Mr. Ethan Underwood as he rode down-town. His mental faculties were groping for a fugitive memory which for the first part of his trip persisted in eluding him.

He had recognized Hemment immediately. Although he had seen the *Mercury's* star reporter only once before—when the latter had called at his office to inquire as to the whereabouts of Cecilie Harvey—the newspaperman had made such a deep impression on him that he had no difficulty in identifying the young man whom he had just encountered on the subway stairs. It was the identity of Hemment's fair companion which puzzled him. There had been something hauntingly familiar about the woman's face. He was positive that he had met her somewhere. But, try as he would, he was exasperatingly unsuccessful for a while in recalling the time, place, and circumstances of that meeting.

Then suddenly, just as the train thundered into the Fourteenth Street station, Underwood's mutinous memory began to function. The look of bewilderment on his features dissolved into an expression of alarm. With a muttered ejaculation he jumped up and rushed out of the side door of the car. It had been his original intention to ride all the way to Brooklyn, where he had a social engagement, but this sudden recollection that had come to him caused him to change his plans.

He crossed the platform and boarded an up-town local. Fifteen minutes later he stood at the card tubes of a well-known Broadway hotel, impatiently awaiting a response to the note he had just sent up to a room on the ninth floor, via the pneumatic carrier.

"Mr. Moncrief will see you, sir," the clerk announced presently. "He says you are to go right up."

The guest on the ninth floor greeted his visitor with a frown.

"You shouldn't have come here," he protested as he closed the door and turned the key in the lock. "It was deucedly unwise—particularly at this time. You have no right to take such chances."

"I know," Underwood said. "But I have something to tell you which wouldn't keep till morning. It was imperative that I see you immediately, no matter what the risk."

He paused and paced the length of the room nervously, two or three times, before he spoke again.

"I have made a rather startling discovery," he went on. "You remember that night when we were at that roadhouse in Westchester, you pointed out to me a young woman seated at a corner table, and told me that she was one of our most promising workers?"

Moncrief nodded. "You mean little Kitty Walters? She was there with her husband—the chap who took a flop the other day and got himself locked up in the Tombs. What about her?"

"Unless I am greatly mistaken I encountered that same young woman, less

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than an hour ago, on the steps of the Seventy-Second Street subway station," said Underwood. "She was accompanied by a young man whom I recognized as a reporter on the *Mercury*."

A shadow flitted across Mr. Moncrief's aristocratic features, but he recovered his composure almost immediately.

"In the company of a reporter, eh?" he exclaimed. "Well, what of it? If it was anybody else but Mrs. Walters, I'd say there might be cause for feeling uneasy, but we don't have to be afraid of that little woman. She's a match for any newspaperman when it comes to brains, and there isn't any question about her loyalty."

"I have been in communication with her since her husband's arrest, and she has satisfied me that there is no danger of either of them squealing, no matter how the case turns out. If that's all your bad news is, old fellow, I don't see anything particularly startling about it."

"You may change your mind when I tell you that the *Mercury* man I saw her with to-night was a chap named Hemment," the accountant remarked sardonically. "Perhaps you may recall my speaking to you of him before? He's the fellow who came to see me at my office the day after the—er—after that unfortunate business in the building across the street." He paused. "Hemment was interested in the murder of Wrigley then; and now we find him cultivating the acquaintance of the Walters woman. It might be only a coincidence, of course, but—I don't like the looks of it."

"She's a clever little woman," Moncrief reiterated with a dubious frown. "I hardly think he'll succeed in getting much out of her. Besides, she doesn't know anything about—"

"That isn't the point," the other cut in. "Whether she tells him anything or not, the fact remains that he seems to perceive a possible connection between the arrest of her husband for forgery and those murder cases he has been working on. And if he is as near to the truth as that already, I believe we have serious cause for not sleeping well to-night."

The other man's face darkened again, and this time the shadow remained there. "Tell me just what he said to you that day he came to see you," he demanded.

"He came to inquire about Cecilie. His paper was worried over her failure to show up at the office, and they assigned Hemment to look into the matter. She had told him of her engagement to me, so it seemed only natural that he should look me up in the hope that I might be able to tell him what had become of her."

"I told him that I was not engaged to her," Underwood continued, "and succeeded in making him believe that I had not seen or heard from her in weeks. At least, I thought I had made him believe that. He appeared to be thoroughly convinced when we parted. But now I am not so sure."

"How much did he know about that lip-reading business at that time?" Moncrief asked, scowling.

"Not a great deal—unless he was making a fool of me. He was aware, of course, that those fellows had some mysterious reason for requiring the services of an expert lip-reader. But he professed to be all at sea as to what they were up to. If he knew then that it was my window they were interested in, he certainly managed to conceal his knowledge from me. His visit had me pretty much worried at first but by the time he left I was completely reassured."

The accountant smiled grimly. "We parted on the best of terms, and I was quite sure that he had no suspicion of the truth. Not until to-night, when I saw him in the company of the Walters woman, did it dawn on me that we had anything to fear from him, even though he has the reputation of being the best newspaperman on Park Row."

Moncrief nodded. "It looks rather bad. In the circumstances I am inclined to agree with you that there is some occasion for alarm."

"Some occasion! I regard the situation as so serious that I have come here now to tell you that I am going to make my getaway immediately, and advise you to do the same. I have seen the writing on the

wall, and I intend to flit while the flitting's good."

The other man scowled and shook his head in emphatic disapproval.

"I said that there was some occasion for alarm—not for panic," he remarked coolly. "Don't talk like a fool, Ethan. I thought I had succeeded in making you thoroughly understand that the very worst move you could make at present would be to take to cover. Our safety depends on your conducting yourself as though you had nothing to conceal and nothing to be afraid of."

"But if this fellow Hemment—"

"Don't worry about Hemment," Moncrief interrupted. "He'll be taken care of."

If he had been a political boss promising a constituent to find a soft job for one of his relatives his tone could not have been more suave or his manner less emotional, but there was an expression on his features as he said the words which made the accountant shudder.

"Good Heavens!" the latter gasped. "You don't mean—you're not thinking of—er—going to extremes? There has been too much of that already."

The other man shrugged. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature," he quoted cynically. "It is the only law for which I have ever entertained a truly wholesome respect. If this newspaperman knows enough about our affairs to be a menace to our well-being, steps must be taken to make sure that he doesn't have a chance to use that knowledge to our disadvantage."

CHAPTER XXI.

KITTY DISCLOSES.

IF Mr. Moncrief could have heard what passed between Mrs. Kitty Walters and her companion that evening, he would probably have revised his opinion as to that young woman's astuteness and dependability. For she was so completely beguiled by the *Mercury* reporter's representations, plus the magnetism of his personality, that before the taxicab had trav-

eled its first mile she was talking to him as freely as if she had known him all her life. The suspicion that he might be other than what he seemed had entirely vanished from her mind.

Kitty was no fool, but the circumstances were against her and in the favor of the plausible young man who sat beside her. As Hemment had foreseen, she had taken the precaution, before keeping her appointment with him, of getting in communication with her husband, in an indirect way, and had received word from the man in the Tombs that he was much more comfortable now so far as his craving for morphin was concerned.

"I see you managed to put it across all right," she remarked smilingly to Hemment, as soon as they were seated in the taxicab. "You're some little fixer!"

"Put it across? Oh, you mean the dope? You've heard from Jim already, have you? Yes; it was a cinch—went through as smooth as velvet." Her companion grinned. "Pays to have a pull, don't it?"

"It pays to have a pal," said the woman with a fervor which caused Hemment to experience an acute twinge in the vicinity of his conscience. "You're all right, Mr. Lyons! Jimmy will never forget this good turn you've done him, and you can be sure I sha'n't forget it either."

She bent swiftly, and when she resumed her normal posture she held in her hand the same thick roll of bills which she had offered him once before.

"I guess we can settle up now without any danger," she said. "Whatever it cost you to grease the wheels—"

"Aw, forget it, sister!" the newspaperman cut her short, waving away the proffered currency. "It ain't goin' to cost you a cent—or me, neither."

"How do you mean? I thought—"

"The bird what owns these duds I'm wearin' is goin' to foot the bill," Hemment announced with a laugh. "There was something else in that suit-case besides clothes. I made a bigger haul than I expected."

He paused. "Put away your kale, little woman. I didn't come here to collect from

you. That ain't the big idea at all. What I want to talk to you about is Jim's case. What's bein' done about gettin' him out? He ought to have a good mouthpiece. That's the first thing to be attended to."

To a young lady as well versed in the lingo of the underworld as Kitty it was of course unnecessary to explain that "mouthpiece" was crooks' jargon for an attorney at law.

"Don't worry about that," she responded. "It's already been attended to. Jim's gettin' the best counsel that money can hire."

"Good! So the gang's stickin', eh?"

The woman's reaction to this remark was the best evidence of the extent to which her companion had succeeded in disarming her suspicions. She did not bridle at his reference to a gang this time, as she had done when he had put out that "feeler" at their first meeting. It did not even occur to her that his words were in the nature of an insinuation.

"Why shouldn't the gang stick?" she said. "It's to their own interest as much as ours to see Jim through. He's no squealer, of course; but he couldn't be expected to face the music all alone if he ain't properly backed up."

"Of course not," Hemment assented. "Only, knowin' what I do about that bird Lestrade, I thought it just possible—"

"Lestrade?" Kitty cut in, arching her eyebrows. "Who's he?"

"Maybe you know him better under one of his other monnikers. I thought Jim knew that the big noise what calls himself Moncrief was at one time known as Alton Lestrade, or Duke Lestrade. You don't mean to say that a couple of wise guys like you and Jim ain't got that baby's number?"

Kitty shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Jim and I don't know much about him," she declared. "He might be the president of the League of Nations, for all we'd know to the contrary. You see, our relations with him are strictly business. He hands us the phony paper, and we're expected to take it without askin' any questions, and bring him back fifty per cent of the proceeds after we've disposed of it.

We work on a percentage basis. Half of what we make we keep, and the other half we turn over to him. Those are the only times we ever come in contact with him, and he never has much to say then. He isn't what you'd call a talkative sort of bird, anyway."

"I figured you might have got a line on him from some of the bunch you work with."

"We never meet the rest of the bunch. Don't even know who they are. The boss—the man you call Lestrade—is the only one we have dealings with."

The young woman made these assertions with such an air of sincerity that the newspaperman's hopes sank to zero. True, he had wrung from her an admission which confirmed his belief that Moncrief was the manager and go-between of the band of forgers, but he had been so sure of that fact already that he did not derive much satisfaction from the disclosure. If Mrs. Kitty Walters was not in a position to give him more information than this he was out of luck indeed.

He took care to conceal his disappointment from his companion, however. Both of them were silent for a while, as the cab bowled along the driveways of Central Park.

"How long you been paired up with Jim?" Hemment asked presently. "He didn't send me an invite to his weddin', you know. Never knew he had a wife till the other day."

"We've been married four years," Mrs. Walters told him; and without any urging she proceeded to confide to him some of the details of her romance and her earlier biography.

She was the daughter of respectable people, he learned. In her childhood she had exhibited certain wayward tendencies which had compelled her anxious parents to place her in a convent near New York. Finding her new environment not at all congenial, she had sought escape one evening, via an open window, and had run out of the convent grounds and almost into the arms of a dapper young man who happened to be coming along the road at that moment.

Mr. James Pelton Walters, as this young man called himself, had not been slow to perceive the physical attractiveness of the young refugee. Gallantly he had volunteered to assist her, and they had come to New York together. By the time they arrived in the big city her escort had made the discovery that she "was there with the gray matter as well as easy to look at," and this happy combination had made such a deep impression on him that he had impulsively suggested that they visit the City Hall together and apply for a marriage license.

It was not until after their marriage that Kitty learned that her lord and master was a professional crook, an ex-convict, and a dope-fiend. These disclosures, however, did not startle or dismay her as much as might have been expected. She had cheerfully consented to aid and abet him in his professional career, and under his tutelage had quickly developed into such a capable side partner that Mr. Walters considered himself the most fortunate young man who had ever plunged into matrimony.

"We weren't always in this line of graft, though," the young woman naively informed Hemment. "Jim was a 'moll-buzzer' when I first met him, and that was our game for the first couple of years. Then we tried our hand at mail-boxes. That's how we got in with Moncrief."

"Mail-boxes?" the reporter exclaimed.

"Fishing letters out of mail-boxes on street corners, with a bit of copper wire and a lump of wax," she elucidated. "A pal of Jim's put us wise to that stunt and introduced us to a man who offered us a good price for all the letters we could bring him that had checks in them. It was pretty good graft. Of course a large part of the mail we yanked out we had to throw away, as it was of no value to us, but you'd be surprised how many checks we got."

"We generally selected the boxes in the business district, and we got our best results around the first of the month, when the mails were heavy with the remittances the firms were sending out in payment of bills; but even at other times we made out fairly well."

"I suppose this man you sold the checks to was an agent of Lestrade's?" Hemment suggested.

"Yes. It was some time, though, before we knew where he fitted in—or cared, for that matter. He paid us spot cash, and we took the money and asked no questions. Of course, we was wise that he wasn't collectin' autographs, but the less we knew about what happened to those slips of paper after they was in his hands, the better for all concerned; so we made no attempt to pry into his business."

"But one day, after we had been dealing with him for some months, he made us a proposition. He said we had been doing such good work that we was in line for promotion, and he asked us how we would like to try our luck as layers-down instead of as feeders. There was much bigger money to be made at that end of the game, he told us; and when we heard that of course we asked him to lead us to it. So a couple of nights later he introduces us to the big boss—the guy you call Lestrade—and ever since then we've been layin' down the phony paper."

Mrs. Kitty Walters thereupon entertained her companion with a recital of her most thrilling and diverting experiences as a passer of forged checks. In other circumstances Hemment would have found these reminiscences exceedingly interesting, but now even their potential value as material for a "Sunday special" did not arouse his enthusiasm. He was impatient to get back to the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"You're a clever kid," he cut in presently. "But just the same, you want to look out for that skunk Lestrade. Take it from me, sister, he's a bad actor."

"Why, what have you got against him?" Kitty asked curiously.

"Perhaps nothing personally—maybe a great deal. That all depends on what's become of a certain swell little moll I'm interested in. I ain't got any proof, but I have a hunch that he could answer that question better than any one else."

"What makes you suppose that?"

The reporter laughed bitterly. "If you was a guy that was sweet on a dame, and

you knew that another guy was makin' eyes at her, too, and the little lady suddenly disappears—drops totally out of sight without even wishin' you good-by—who would you be inclined to suspect yourself?" he demanded.

"I see," said the woman at his side, sympathetically. "You have a suspicion that she has shaken you for him?"

"No; not that. She didn't shake me of her own free will. Nobody could make me believe that she would ever have quit me cold of her own hook. She was the truest, squarest little pal that ever lived. If Lestrade's got her, he must have practically kidnaped her, and he's keepin' her hidden away somewhere without her consent." Hemment sighed. "I wish I knew," he muttered. "But, as I said before, I ain't got any proof, and no way of findin' out."

There followed a short pause; then suddenly Kitty gave vent to an excited ejaculation, and followed it with a question that caused her companion's heart to skip a couple of beats.

"What did this girl of yours look like?" she asked. "Was she a blonde—a little bit of a thing, with big blue eyes and—"

"That's her!" Hemment interrupted, with an eagerness that was not the least bit feigned. "You know where she is?"

"No; I haven't the remotest idea where she is now," Mrs. Walters told him. "But I am pretty sure I saw her a couple of weeks ago—dining with this guy you call Lestrade, in a roadhouse up in Westchester County."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN A NEW LIGHT.

"THERE are lots of blondes in the world, of course," Kitty reminded the excited young man beside her. "It might not have been the same one you are interested in, Mr. Lyons. You don't want to go up in the air too quick. But it's a fact that I saw a young woman who answers the description of your girl, seated at a table at the Squirrel's Tail Inn, shortly before midnight, one—"

"The Squirrel's Tail Inn!" Hemment interrupted, a note of incredulity in his tone. The reputation of the place was not unknown to him. It was not the sort of resort which nice girls like Cecilie Harvey were in the habit of frequenting, even when properly chaperoned. "And she was there—alone with Lestrade?"

"No; she wasn't alone with him. That's the interesting part of it. There was another man at their table—and who do you suppose he was? None other than that lame duck we met on the subway stairs to-night. I told you I had an idea that his map was sort of familiar. And when you brought up the subject of your girl it came back to me like a flash where I'd seen him before. He and the boss and the little blond girl were dining together that night.

"Jim an' I was tryin' out a car that we had a chance to buy cheap," Mrs. Walters went on. "That's how we happened to drop into that joint. We were feelin' sort of dry, and Jim suggested we get out and take a little liquid refreshment. As soon as we breezed in I lamped Moncrief and his party, and called my husband's attention to them. Of course we didn't speak to the boss, though, or let on that we knew him. That isn't done, you know, in our circles. We took a table in a corner at the other end of the room, and proceeded to mind our own business. But I kept looking over at the little blonde Moncrief had with him. She was such a good-looker, and so different from the regular breed of chickens that hang out in that dump, that I couldn't keep my eyes off her."

"How did she act?" Hemment asked. "Did she appear to be—er—unhappy?"

"Not a bit. She was the life of the party." Kitty placed her hand gently on her companion's arm. "Of course it may not have been the same girl, Mr. Lyons, but if it was her—well, I'm afraid there's nothing doing on that kidnaping theory of yours. She certainly didn't behave as though she was there against her will. She was eating and drinking and laughing—she seemed to be having a perfectly good time."

The reporter frowned. "You say it

was a couple of weeks ago that this happened?"

"More than a couple of weeks. To be exact, it was the tenth of last month. I can fix the date positively because it was Jim's birthday the following day. That was why we were out joy-riding. I was going to buy him the car for a birthday present, and—"

"The tenth of last month!" Hemment cut in excitedly. "Ye gods!"

The date which the woman had mentioned was the day on which Wrigley had been murdered. And eight hours after that tragic incident a girl who answered Cecilie Harvey's description had sat in a notorious resort, in the company of two men, one of whom at least, Hemment was positive, was responsible for the murder. She had sat with Underwood and Lestrade, eating and drinking with them and having a perfectly good time!

It seemed incredible that this woman could have been his little girl reporter friend, and yet he found himself unable to banish the unpleasant suspicion which Kitty's story had thrust into his mind. Up to this moment he had entertained no doubt as to Cecilie's character. That she was the innocent dupe of Underwood—in total ignorance of the fellow's real standing in the community and of his sinister associations—he had felt quite certain.

The note which he, Hemment, had received from her the morning after the murder of Wrigley, containing the emphatic statement that her motive for dropping out of sight had nothing whatever to do with that tragic occurrence, he had regarded merely as an evidence of her faith in the plausible rascal who, probably, had practically dictated those lines to her, and who had succeeded in making her believe what she wrote.

That a little thoroughbred like Cecilie could have been in the confidence of these desperate criminals, and willing to aid and abet them in their nefarious activities, with a full knowledge of what was going on, was the last thing the star reporter had been willing to believe.

But now he was not so sure. After all, his acquaintance with the girl was only a

matter of weeks. He knew nothing about her antecedents except the few details which she had told him—and they were uncorroborated. Her sweetness had gone to his head like strong wine. The very first time he had seen her seated at her typewriter in the *Mercury's* city room he had been ready to vote her the most charming, unsophisticated little woman who had ever ground out copy in a newspaper office.

But one never could tell! He had seen the faces of angels smiling at him from portraits in the rogues' gallery at police headquarters. He had interviewed more than one notorious woman criminal whose deportment and speech had been refined and pleasing enough to cover a multitude of sins. Why, even this woman crook at his side now had been able to dupe shrewd business men into cashing bogus checks by posing as a gentlewoman. Little Miss Harvey might be all that she had seemed—but then again she might not. Nobody at the *Mercury* office really knew a great deal about her—not even Bailey, the city editor.

Of course, even if it really was she whom Kitty Walters had seen at the Squirrel's Tail Inn, that night, her presence in that resort of criminals would not necessarily mean that she was in the confidence of her companions, but just the same Hemment found himself, very much against his inclination, wondering for the first time whether it might not be necessary to revise his theory as to the status of the missing girl reporter.

"Yes; it was the tenth of last month that I saw her," Kitty broke in upon his unpleasant reflections. "What's the matter? Does the date make any special difference?"

"It sure does," he answered, forcing a laugh. "You had me goin' for a couple of minutes, sister, but I feel much better now. If you're dead sure about the day and hour, I guess that settles it. This 'moll you been talkin' about couldn't have been the party I got in mind, after all. You see, she's got an alibi. She wasn't missin' then, and I know where she was at that time."

"Is that so?" said Kitty. "Well, I'm glad of it."

"So am I," rejoined the fake Mr. Tommy Lyons. "It's fierce enough to be kept guessin' what's become of her, but even that's better than if she had given me the razz and gone to Lestrade of her own free will." He hesitated. "By the way, I want you to make me a promise."

"What is it?"

"When you see that big stiff again, don't let on to him anything that I've told you."

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Lyons," the woman assured him.

"Cross your heart on it," he insisted, grinning.

Mrs. Walters obediently performed that ceremony.

"Honor among thieves, you know," she said demurely. Then she glanced at her wrist watch. "Good Heavens! It's nearly eleven o'clock. Time we was getting along home. Late hours spoil one's good looks, and I need them in my business."

They parted company a few blocks from the woman's home. Kitty proceeded the rest of the distance on foot and alone. A smile illuminated her pretty face as she crossed the threshold of the apartment house and caught sight of the two Central Office men hovering in the shadows. She guessed that they were the same men who had unsuccessfully tried to trail her when she had left the premises a few hours before, and the thought of their discomfiture appealed to her sense of humor. She let herself into her apartment on the fourth floor, but she did not remain there very long.

The telephone rang, and when she took up the receiver a series of faint but distinct taps of irregular duration came to her ears. The person on the other end of the wire was drumming on his transmitter with a lead pencil, and even before she had spelled out the message which came to her in the alphabet of the Morse code Mrs. Walters knew who that person was.

"All right," she tapped back. "I'll be there inside of an hour."

Five minutes later Oglivie's men saw her

leave the house again and shadowed her to the subway station for the second time that night. They followed her aboard a downtown express and rode with her, although not in the same car, to the Ninety-Sixth Street junction. There she changed to a northbound local on the other branch of the line and rode out to a station in the Bronx, where a solitary taxicab was waiting for her by appointment.

The station was situated on a quiet, suburban road, and her cab was the only vehicle in sight. The discomfited sleuths therefore were unable to shadow her beyond this point. All they could do was to take the number of the cab, as she rode off in it, smilingly triumphant, with the idea of interviewing the chauffeur later. But the latter was an ex-convict, and one of Moncrief's most trusted underlings, so their prospects of getting any information out of him were not very bright.

Having thus succeeded in again eluding espionage, Kitty rode out to the entrance of the Bronx Park Zoological Gardens, where Mr. Moncrief stood impatiently awaiting her arrival.

"You see, I managed it all right," she remarked lightly, as he jumped into the cab and seated himself beside her. "But what's the idea of making me lose my beauty sleep? Anything wrong, chief?"

"There may be," Moncrief answered sardonically. "Depends on what you've been saying to that newspaperman."

Kitty arched her eyebrows. "Newspaperman!" she exclaimed. "Ring off, boss! You've got the wrong number. I haven't been—"

"The man you were with to-night, on the stairs of the Seventy-Second Street subway station."

"Oh, him! He wasn't a newspaperman. How do you get that way? He was an old pal of Jim's—a safe-blower named Tommy Lyons, who did us a good turn by smuggling dope into the Tombs for—"

"Tommy Lyons, hell!" Moncrief cut in. "His name is Hemment, and he is a reporter on the *Mercury*. The person who saw you with him to-night knows him well and has positively identified him."

"Good Heavens!" the woman gasped. "Are you sure?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt. You little fool! Do you mean to say you've let him bluff you into giving him the information he was after? I thought you had brains."

Mrs. Walters winced.

"He was pretty smooth," she defended herself. "And all of us make mistakes, sometimes."

"You ought to have seen through him." Her companion growled. "What did you tell him?"

"Nothing," Kitty lied. "Nothing at all."

She was afraid of this man—fearful that he might leave her husband to his fate if she admitted that she had "spilled the beans," and a little bit apprehensive too on her own account; for there was an expression on Mr. Moncrief's face that alarmed her.

"Even if he was a newspaperman, which I can hardly believe," she went on, "there is no reason to go up in the air, chief. He didn't get any information out of me, I can assure you. The little that I know about the gang I'm not spilling—even to Jim's pals."

"Then what did you and he talk about?"

"Mostly about the scheme to keep Jim supplied with dope while he's in the jug. It was him that did most of the talking." Kitty hesitated. "As a matter of fact, he seemed to know more about you than I do," she added maliciously.

"About me?"

"Sure. He slipped me the information that you was the head of the gang, and he called you by a monniker that I had never heard you called by before."

"Ah!" Moncrief exclaimed sharply. "You don't happen to remember the name, do you?"

"I think it was Lestrade. Yes; that was it—Alton Lestrade. He said that he had your number, and—"

Mrs. Walters was interrupted by a muttered imprecation from the man at her side. The look on his countenance had been unpleasant enough a minute ago, but

now it had become so menacing that it made her shudder.

"So he knows—he referred to me by that name, did he?" said he. "So much the worse for Mr. Hemment!" He was thoughtfully silent for a moment. Then he asked: "When are you going to see him again? I suppose he made a date for another meeting?"

"No; he didn't. He said he might drop in on me some time, if he could manage it without the dicks gettin' wise, but we didn't arrange anything definite."

"Too bad!" Mr. Moncrief commented. "We can't afford to wait until it suits his convenience to look you up again. There isn't any time to be lost. You must contrive to send him an invitation that will bring him running to you as soon as he gets it. You can manage that, eh?"

Kitty nodded.

"I'll manage it," she promised, a glint in her eyes. "If what you've told me about him is true, I'm burning up with impatience to have another talk with that bird."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LURE.

HEMMENT was personally acquainted with one of the employees of the Squirrel's Tail Inn, a waiter known as "Squinty" Davis for reasons which became perfectly obvious as soon as one looked upon his countenance. Immediately after parting company with the Walters woman the reporter proceeded to look up this man on the chance that he might be able and willing to furnish some helpful information appertaining to the blond girl whom Kitty had seen dining there. The chance was a slim one, to be sure, but in his eagerness to locate Cecilie Harvey and learn the truth about her disappearance Hemment was ready to clutch at straws. So he lost no time in visiting the resort.

The Squirrel's Tail Inn was a dilapidated frame structure situated about twenty miles from Times Square, on a lonely stretch of country road which was so little used by motorists that the place would not have

been able to pay expenses if it had been obliged to rely on transient patronage. But its proprietor, a heavy-jowled, square-headed man, who was an ex-pugilist and, incidentally, an ex-convict, did not have to cater to strangers, and in fact did not desire their custom. The inn had its regular patrons, to whom its obscurity was not the least of its attractions, and if you were not known there you were likely to be made to feel by both the management and the guests that you were very much *persona non grata*.

It was after midnight when Hemment arrived, but the night was still young from the standpoint of the class of people who frequented the resort, and the tables were nearly all filled. The rat-faced, furtive-looking men, and the bold-eyed, painted women, who sat at them regarded the newcomer with hostile suspicion as he made his way to a far corner near which his waiter friend hovered.

Squinty Davis came over to him the instant he was seated.

"What 'll you have, boss?" he inquired, handing the visitor a wine-card—this was slightly before the era of the Volstead Act. Then in a lower tone he added appealingly: "Order something, Mr. Hemment, but for the love of Pete don't let on that you know me, sir. The boss is lookin' this way, and I'm liable to get canned if he gets wise that I'm hobnobbin' with a newspaperman."

"All right; bring me an English mutton chop and a bottle of ale, waiter," said the *Mercury* reporter. "But I've got to have a talk with you, Squinty," he went on, sinking his voice to a whisper. "Something important. When will you be through here?"

"Not till three o'clock. But if you'll wait for me behind the wood-shed at the rear I can sneak out for a few minutes when you leave."

Hemment finished his chop and departed, not unaware as he made his way between the tables that he was still an object of mistrustful curiosity to the other guests and to the managerial staff. For the benefit of the latter he stepped into the taxicab which had brought him there

and drove away. But after he had traveled a short distance along the dark country road he stopped the vehicle and crept back on foot to the wood-shed at the rear of the building, where he was presently joined by Davis, the waiter.

"What is it, Mr. Hemment?" the latter inquired hoarsely. "Make it short, please, whatever it is. I managed to sneak out from the kitchen, but if I ain't back on the job in a couple of minutes I'll be missed sure."

"Ever hear of a man named Lestrade, Squinty?"

"No, I can't say that I have. He's a new one to me."

"Moncrief, then? Possibly you know him better by that name."

The waiter shook his head.

"I'm afraid you've come to the wrong shop. I never heard of the party. What's his line?"

"Listen," said the reporter. "I'll tell you what I'm after in a few words. A couple of weeks ago a young woman came here with two men. It was on the tenth of last month, around midnight, to be exact. The girl was a blonde and very pretty. One of the men was slightly lame, and—"

"I get you," the other cut in. "I remember the lame guy perfectly—and the moll, too. She was some little peach. I waited on them myself, and—What's the idea, Mr. Hemment? What do you want to know about them?"

"All that you can tell me. I've got to get a line on those people, and any help you can give me, Squinty, will be greatly appreciated."

"Well, I'd go the limit any time to help you, Mr. Hemment," the fellow declared. And he meant it, too. Whatever his weaknesses, ingratitude was not among them, and he had not forgotten the circumstances under which he had first made the acquaintance of the *Mercury's* star reporter. He had been in trouble at the time, charged with the murder of a New York policeman in a gang fight in that squalid and turbulent section of New York known as "Hell's Kitchen," and if it hadn't been for Hemment, who was investigating the matter for

his paper, he surely would have been railroaded to the electric-chair for a crime of which he happened to be absolutely guiltless.

"I'm afraid, though, I can't tell you very much," he went on regretfully. "They were strangers to me—all three of them. One of the party, the old bird with the gray hair, seemed to be a friend of the boss's, but I don't remember ever seeing him or the others in this joint before." He paused. "About all I can tell you, sir, is that it was a wedding party."

"A wedding party!" Hemment exclaimed sharply.

"Well, I ain't even sure of that," said Squinty Davis. "But I waited on them at table, and from things I heard them say I got the idea that the lame guy and the moll had just got hitched and was celebratin' the happy event.

"They was orderin' wine as if it was water; and I remember the old bird raisin' his glass and sayin' 'Here's to the health of the bride!' That was what first tipped me off to the newlyweds. And later several other remarks were passed. I disremember just what was said now, but it was enough to put me wise that the guy with the limp and the little blond baby was on their honeymoon." He grinned. "Some dump to spend a honeymoon in, eh?"

"How long were they here?" the newspaperman asked, frowning.

"They went away around 3 A.M.—in a big touring-car. They was all feelin' pretty good, but none of them was exactly loaded. The men had mopped up a lot of the juice, but they acted as though they knew how to carry it; and the moll hadn't taken more than enough to make her feel happy."

"Have you any idea where they went after they left here, Squinty?"

"No, Mr. Hemment; I haven't. I didn't hear anything said about that. I can't even tell you which direction they took. I followed them as far as the front door, and saw them get into the car, but I didn't wait to see them start off. I guess I've told you all I know. Sorry I can't give you any more help."

Hemment returned to town in an exceedingly dejected frame of mind. He had re-

ceived a greater shock than he cared to admit, even to himself.

Not that he ought not to have been prepared for it. Had not his city editor, several days ago, suggested that the man in the Bannister Building, probably not being unaware of the fact that a wife cannot be compelled to testify against her husband in a criminal proceeding, might induce Cecilie to consent to an immediate marriage so as to guard against the danger of her being obliged to tell on the witness-stand what she knew about the murders of Wrigley and Gilder? That suggestion had caused him, Hemment, some uneasiness, but he had tried to persuade himself, and had almost succeeded, that even if he contemplated such a move Underwood had not as yet put it into effect. He had hoped to find the girl in time to open her eyes to the real character of the man who had won her heart, to warn her before she was hurried into taking a step which might wreck her whole life.

It was very late when he reached his bachelor apartment, but he spent an hour before he turned in, meditating over the events of the day, with the aid of his favorite brier. When, finally, he did go to bed, and to sleep, he saw that wedding feast at the Squirrel's Tail Inn again in his dreams. Only this time the picture was different. A startling change had come over his little girl-reporter friend. She was still as petite, pretty, and dainty as when he had last seen her, but she seemed to have changed faces with Mrs. Kitty Walters. Her childlike, ingenuous cast of countenance had hardened into lines of bold sophistication. She laughed with a cynicism which made the reporter shudder in his slumber as she leaned over the table to listen to a story which her husband's good friend, Mr. Moncrief, alias Alton Lestrade, was relating. In his dream Hemment heard that story, too. It was a detailed account of the last moments on earth of the man who had been strangled to death on the twentieth floor of the Interborough Building. And Mrs. Ethan Underwood—*née* Cecilie Harvey—appeared to be greatly diverted by the recital, and bestowed upon the narrator the full meed of her admiration.

The dreamer found her depravity so pain-

ful that for once he could have blessed the musically inclined young gentleman in the apartment beneath him who rescued him from this nightmare by a ragged rendition of "Annie Laurie" on a particularly wheezy trombone.

Hemment sat up in bed, with a deep breath of relief, and looked at his alarm-clock. It was nearly noon, and, being thoroughly tired out, he had set the alarm for 1 P.M.; but further sleep being out of the question with that discordant racket going full blast down-stairs, he arose and dressed himself.

When presently he went down to the street in quest of his breakfast a shabbily dressed man came up behind him and touched his arm.

"Mr. Lyons?" the stranger inquired in a hoarse whisper.

Forgetting his recent alias for the moment, he was about to deny the identification when recollection came to him.

"That's me, partner," he admitted. "Whatcher want?"

"A moll told me to slip you this," the other explained, thrusting an envelope into the surprised newspaperman's hand.

Hemment started to ask a question, but the fellow hurried away without a word. He turned his attention to the missive. It was from Kitty Walters, and it ran as follows:

DEAR MR. LYONS:

Can you meet me to-night at nine, at the same place as before? Something very important. I believe I have located the party we were discussing last night.

He read this communication through twice; then grinned whimsically.

"Pretty thin!" he mused.

Anybody who was more than half-witted could have seen through this ruse, he thought. The manner in which the message had come to him was of itself enough to give the game away. How did the woman's mysterious emissary happen to be aware that it was possible to get in touch with Mr. Tommy Lyons, expert safe-blower, by hanging around the premises in which Gordon Hemment, of the New York *Mercury*, made his home? The answer was, of course, that Kitty had discovered his mas-

querade and had decided to adopt this crude device in the hope of luring him into an ambush.

He could guess what had happened. Ever since his unfortunate encounter with Underwood on the steps of the Seventy-Second Street subway station he had been wondering whether the man in the Bannister Building had recognized his companion as well as himself. Now he knew that such was the case. The accountant had gone to Lestrade with the news of what he had seen, and they had got in communication with Mrs. Walters and made her aware how she had been deceived. Now she was trying to coax him into this ingenuously perceptible trap—which no doubt had been set for him by Lestrade himself.

Still the woman claimed to have information regarding the whereabouts of Cecilie. The bait was certainly tempting. There was a chance—one in a million perhaps—that his suspicions were unwarranted. And, at all events, the rendezvous she had appointed seemed to be a safe enough place, from his standpoint. It was difficult to see how one could be in much danger of physical violence on a crowded subway express platform. Too many people around for Lestrade, or his underlings, to attempt any rough stuff there. He might as well see the thing through up to that point, anyway, he decided.

At half past eight that evening he went to his desk in the *Mercury* city room, took a navy automatic from one of the drawers, slipped it in his coat-pocket, and hurried up-town on a subway express to keep his second appointment with Mrs. Kitty Walters.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

KITTY was waiting for him. There was nothing about her manner to indicate any change in her sentiments toward him, except that perhaps her smile of greeting was a little more cordial than usual.

"So you've come!" she said. "I had an idea that my message would bring you on the run. Not that it isn't true, though.

I've got some very good news for you, Mr. Lyons."

"You've really located that little moll of mine?" Hemment asked.

"I feel pretty sure that I have. It's possible that I may be mistaken, but—you shall have a chance to see for yourself to-night."

"You are going to take me to her?"

The woman nodded. "If you're a good boy you shall see her within an hour," she promised. "But let's go up-stairs to the street. It isn't safe for us to be seen talking together down here."

Her companion thought that the spot on which they stood would be a good deal safer, so far as he was concerned, than any destination she might have in mind. But he did not make any objection to accompanying her to the street level. The clatter and roar of the underground made conversation on the station platform rather difficult, and he knew that at that hour the sidewalks at Seventy-Second Street and Broadway would be crowded with pedestrians, so that he would be almost as secure up there as down below, no matter what course of action this fair siren might be contemplating.

"It sure was good of you, sister, to make this date with me," he remarked, as they mounted the stairs. "But that note of yours has got me guessin'. How did you know how and where to connect with me? That's what I can't figure out at all."

Mrs. Walters was clearly nonplused for a moment—but only for a moment.

"I thought that would puzzle you," she responded, smiling. "But—I'll explain after we're in the cab."

"In the cab? Are we going to take a ride? You seem rather partial to taxi rides, sister."

Kitty shrugged. "The place where I'm going to take you—where this dame of yours is hidden, is quite some distance from here. You don't expect us to walk, do you?" she returned.

"No; I suppose not. But just the same, Mrs. Walters, if you don't mind, I'd rather have that explanation right now—before I do any traveling with you."

The woman's smile disappeared.

"What's the big idea?" she demanded sharply. "Are you afraid? Do you suspect that I—that you're going to be double-crossed?"

Hemment grinned. "Could you blame me if there was such a suspicion buzzing in me bean?" he rejoined, still taking care to speak the lingo of his rôle, although he felt that the show-down had come and that it was hardly worth while to keep up the pretense any longer. "A guy that I've never seen before, and who, so far as I know, has never lamped me neither, hails me on the street by my monniker, and slips me a letter from you! How does he do it? It looks kind of queer, you gotta admit."

Mrs. Walters hesitated. "All right; you've called the turn," she said. "You shall have your explanation, Mr. Hemment. It—"

"Mr. Hemment! So you know who I am, do you?"

"Yes; I know. Moncrief tipped me off last night, after you had left me. He gave me your home address, too. That's the solution of the mystery of how my messenger was able to reach you. I gave him a description of you and told him to plant himself outside the house until he saw you come out."

"I see," said the newspaperman, genuinely astonished at this sudden frankness on her part, and a bit puzzled as to its significance. "So it was Lestrade who put you wise to my identity, and instructed you to send for me, was it? And that part of your note about your having located Miss—the young lady I am interested in, was all a bluff, eh?"

Kitty shook her head. "No; it wasn't a bluff," she denied. "It was straight goods. I do know where the girl is. And I am going to take you to her to-night—if you are game to come along."

"But—"

"Listen!" the woman interrupted. "I know that you are a newspaperman—that you've been kiddin' me about being in the graft game, and an old pal of Jim's. I'm wise to all that now. But it doesn't cut any ice." She paused. "Things have happened since I saw you last night. I've got that big stiff, Moncrief's, number now, and

I'm off him and the rest of the gang for keeps.

"He tried to frame up to me last night," she went on, indignantly. "Told me that he and the rest of the bunch was going to make a quick getaway, and wanted me to run off with him and leave Jim to be railroaded to jail. The dirty cur! As though I'd shake my man for a yellow dog like him! I'm goin' down to police headquarters to-morrow to squeal. I'm goin' to offer to blow the whole works if they'll make a bargain with me to let Jim down lightly. But I know where that girl you're looking for is hidden, and I thought I might as well put you wise, Mr. Hemment. That 'll help to get square with Moncrief for tryin' to double-cross my husband. Besides, even though you fooled me, you did us a good turn, anyway, by getting the dope through to Jim in the Tombs. I'm not forgettin' that. Now do you understand why I'm willin' to help you?"

Hement frowned dubiously. "Where is this place to which you are going to take me?" he asked.

"It's a house up in the Bronx. They've got her locked up there. I found that out last night, in the course of my talk with Moncrief. She's being held there against her will—a prisoner."

They had reached the street level by this time. A taxicab was standing against the curb. Kitty laid her hand on her companion's arm and drew him toward the vehicle.

"Come on!" she said eagerly. "If you want to rescue her, jump in, and I'll have you there inside of an hour. I know the place well."

Hement hesitated for an instant; then, with a half-shrug, entered the cab.

It was just as they were starting off that he thrust his hand into his coat-pocket and made the rather disconcerting discovery that his automatic was missing. It must have been abstracted only a couple of seconds ago, for his fingers had clutched it as he stepped into the cab. Unfortunately, he had relaxed his vigilance a moment later.

"Lose anything?" Kitty inquired demurely, observing his change of expression.

"A little of my self-esteem," he answered

whimsically. "I ought to have had sense enough to bear in mind that I was dealing with a lady who began her criminal career as a professional pickpocket."

He half rose in his seat, but sank down again immediately. For the woman had whipped his purloined weapon from behind her back, and was pressing the business end against his side.

"Sit down!" she commanded sharply, her eyes narrowing. "What do you think you are going to do?"

"I was contemplating stopping the cab and getting out," Hement frankly informed her. "I have changed my mind about taking this little trip with you, Mrs. Walters."

"Changed your mind!" she sneered. "You've got no choice. You poor fish! We've got you where *we* want *you* now." She laughed ironically. "I thought newspapermen was supposed to be live wires, but from the way you fell for my line of con I'm inclined to think that there's no medals on you."

"Then it was all a bluff—about your having fallen out with Lestrade, and being ready to squeal on the gang?"

"You're beginning to display almost human intelligence," rejoined Kitty mockingly. "You'll soon see how much I've fallen out with the boss."

"You are taking me to him?"

"As fast as we can get there. He has expressed a desire to meet you, and I promised to try to persuade you to do him that honor."

"You're some little persuader!" Hement remarked, grinning. "Have you any idea what Lestrade intends to do with me when he gets me?"

"Not the slightest. He didn't go into details. But you ought to have seen his face last night when I told him that you had called him by that monniker—Alton Lestrade. If you'd seen that look of his you wouldn't be grinning now, you poor boob!"

"You ought not to call me a boob," Hement protested reproachfully. "It really isn't quite fair. After all, a chap who has been successful, even temporarily, in pulling the wool over the eyes of as astute a

person as Mrs. James Pelton Walters is entitled to some credit, I should think."

"Oh, I'll give you credit for that," the woman sneered, her eyes glinting sparks of vindictiveness. "But the last laugh is the best. And it's on you, you cheap four-flusher!"

"Suppose I could convince you that there is some reason for assuming that if you deliver me to Lestrade it will mean the prompt demise of a hard-working and inoffensive newspaperman—would that discourage you from going ahead with this little kidnaping stunt of yours?"

Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know what's going to happen to you, and I don't care," she snapped. "It's none of my business. You horned into this thing like the goat you are, and whatever you get will be coming to you."

"Hard workin' you may be," she went on with rising rancor, "but where do you get that inoffensive stuff? You're not inoffensive to me, you sneakin' stool-pigeon! You did me good and proper, and I hate the sight of you."

"I am sorry you feel that way about me," her companion said with genuine regret. "I assure you it isn't mutual. Frankly, I rather like you, Mrs. Walters. Your ways are not the ways of the righteous, but you impressed me as being a pretty good sport." He paused. "Even now, angry though you are—and have a right to be—over the deception I was obliged to practise on you, I can hardly believe that if I were to try to make my escape from this cab you could be cold-blooded enough to use that gun."

"You just try it and see!" she hissed, poking the muzzle of the automatic further into his ribs.

"I believe I shall—in a minute. I have a hunch that you are only bluffing. If I am any judge of human nature a woman like you wouldn't murder a man just because he had tried to work his way into her confidence by masquerading as a pal of her husband's. I've a good mind to call your bluff."

"Don't be a fool!" the woman warned him. "I don't want to put a bullet into you if I can help it, but—can't you see that

I mean business? I've never shot a man before, but I'd go the limit rather than let you get away."

"You really hate me as much as all that?"

"It isn't a question of how much I hate you. It's because—because I'm afraid of you. Moncrief told me last night that you've got enough on the gang to send us all up the river. He said that if we could get you before you had a chance to spill what you know, there'd be no need to worry about Jim gettin' free, but that, unless you could be stopped, it would be blooey for Jim's chances of beatin' the coop and for the rest of us, too."

"I see," quoth Hemment thoughtfully. "It's really a case of self-preservation then? That's different. I felt confident that you wouldn't pull that trigger out of sheer vindictiveness; but you might do it—for the reasons you've stated. Much obliged, Mrs. Walters, for making the situation clear to me. In the circumstances discretion may be the better part of valor, so far as I am concerned."

Kitty regarded him curiously. "You're a cool bird," she remarked, an involuntary note of admiration in her voice. "Any one would think you was goin' to a tea party, the way you take it."

"Perhaps it will turn out to be a tea party—for me. Perhaps there is a reason for my regarding the situation with equanimity."

"What do you mean?" the woman demanded uneasily.

Her captive was silent for a moment. The sharp, staccato note of an automobile horn came to their ears. He laughed softly.

"You called me a 'boob,' and a 'poor fish' a while ago, Mrs. Walters," he said, "but did you really think that I would be so lacking in discretion as to walk into this trap without—er—taking some measures to protect myself? Suppose I were to tell you that I notified police headquarters before I started out this evening, and that, as a result of my foresight, a car loaded with Central Office men is at this moment trailing along behind us!" He laughed again, triumphantly. "Do you hear that automobile horn? It is a new device, and I under-

stand that the Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noises is trying to have its use prohibited on the city's streets. Until recently I was in sympathy with the movement. That discord is certainly rather jarring on one's nerves. But, circumstances alter cases, and just now it sounds like sweet music to me."

It was an old trick, but it worked—as it will do, nearly every time, no matter how sophisticated the victim. Instinctively, the woman turned her head to glance out of the little window in the rear of the taxicab. Her eyes were away from him for only a couple of seconds, but the newspaperman was prompt in taking advantage of his opportunity. His strong fingers closed around her wrist with a pressure which paralyzed her own digits and made the weapon in her hand a useless thing for the time being.

"Let go of me!" she panted. "Think you're smart, don't you? I'll fill you full of lead, you sneaking—"

"You can't," Hemment interrupted her. "I've no doubt you would if you could, dear lady, but I am working a little jiu-jitsu hold on you, which the son of Nippon, who taught it to me, guaranteed to be infallible in just such emergencies as this. Not only are you unable to pull the trigger, but before another sixty seconds have elapsed you will be reluctantly obliged to drop the gun."

"You coward!" Kitty gasped. Then, raising her voice: "Ed! Ed!" she called shrilly. "Help! Help! Get after this big stiff!"

"Your friend in front doesn't seem to hear you. Fortunately for me he has a conveniently noisy engine," the reporter remarked. "But if you continue to scream you will attract the attention of others—which is bound to be all in my favor."

"I am sorry to have to use force on a woman," he continued, regretfully. "But this is my only chance of extracting myself from a very unpleasant predicament. Unhappily, that little hint I dropped about the car behind, filled with Central Office men, was pure fiction. I was rash enough to keep this appointment with you without taking police headquarters into my confi-

dence. So—ah, that's better! What did I tell you?"

Unable to endure the continuous pressure of his thumb on her knuckles any longer the woman's fingers had unclenched, and the automatic fell to the floor of the car. He reached for it with his free hand and, smashing the glass partition which separated him from the man on the driver's seat, thrust the barrel of the gun through the opening.

The chauffeur had turned at the crash, but he turned back again at Hemment's sharp command.

"As you were!" the newspaperman ordered. "But stop at the next corner. I'm getting out."

Less than a minute later Hemment stood alone on the sidewalk of upper Broadway, and a taxicab containing an exceedingly angry and chagrined young woman was disappearing rapidly down a side street.

"Let me out at the first pay-station telephone we come to," Kitty instructed the driver. "I've got to get the chief on the wire, *pronto*."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BELOVED VOICE.

THE burnt child is supposed to dread the fire, and, if there is anything in these trite old saws, a person who is once bit ought to be twice shy. Nevertheless, within less than twenty-four hours after his experience with Mrs. James Pelton Walters, Hemment was on his way to visit another lady whom he had strong reasons for suspecting of being in close relationship with the enemy.

You can call him a fool, if you wish. He himself would not have denied the impeachment. But, at least, he was not a blind fool. If another trap was being baited for him he was walking into it with his eyes wide open. The bait was sufficiently alluring to reconcile him to whatever Fate might have in store for him at the end of this new adventure.

It came about in the following manner: After his escape from the predicament into which the perfidious Mrs. Walters had en-

snared him, Hemment had gone straight to the *Mercury* office. His mind was now definitely made up. The time had come, he told himself, to close down on the man in the Bannister Building and his sinister associates. Lestrade and his friend Underwood would learn from the Walters woman that he had got away—probably they were already in receipt of that disappointing information—and this development might cause them to decide that the game was up and that immediate flight would be their best move in the circumstances. Perhaps even now it was too late to intercept them, but, anyhow, the police must be put immediately on the tracks of this daring band of forgers, one member of which, at least, was guilty of a far more serious crime than the making and uttering of fraudulent checks and documents.

As soon as he entered the *Mercury's* city room Hemment stepped into a telephone-booth and got Oglivie's residence on the wire, with the intention of making an appointment for an immediate interview with the chief of the Central Office. He was informed, however, that the latter was not at home. He had gone back to his office at police headquarters shortly after dinner.

The newspaperman called up police headquarters, with equally disappointing result. The deputy commissioner had been in the building until 9 P.M., but had gone out then on a case, and it was impossible to get in touch with him right away.

"Will anybody else do?" the man on the headquarters switchboard inquired. "If your business is urgent, Mr. Hemment, I can put you on the inspector's private wire."

Hement declined this offer. He did not wish to deal with Inspector Parkinson, the second in command at the Central Office. Even though time was an important consideration he preferred to take up the matter with Oglivie himself.

"I'll be here until midnight," he said. "If you get in touch with him by that time I wish you'd ask him to give me a ring at once. Tell him it's business of the greatest importance."

Then he sat down at his typewriter and proceeded to pound out the complete story of Cecilie Harvey's queer assignment and

the startling developments that had come out of it. The story was a long one, covering several pages of copy-paper, and it took him two hours to write it. He had no intention of using it that night. The arrests would have to be made, or the warrants at least sworn out, before the facts could be published, but he thought that while waiting for Oglivie to call up he might as well occupy his time by getting the copy ready for the composing-room.

He was just twirling the last page out of the machine when a copy boy informed him that he was wanted on the telephone. He got up quickly and went into a booth. Oglivie at last, he thought; but when he picked up the receiver it was not the police official's voice that he heard. It was not a man's voice at all.

"Is this Mr. Hemment?" came to him in a sweet, familiar contralto that made him jump as though the seat beneath him had suddenly been galvanized.

"Who—who is speaking?" he cried excitedly.

"Don't you recognize the voice?"

"I believe I do. I am quite sure that I do. Unless my ears greatly deceive me—"

"Your ears are not deceiving you. It is I—Cecilie." Then, after a slight pause: "Mr. Hemment, is it true that the—that you have decided not to keep my secret any longer?"

"Your secret?"

"The facts about the—about that unfortunate assignment of mine. I understand—I have been told that the *Mercury* is going to print the story, after all, and—"

"Who told you that?"

"If it isn't too late," the girl went on, ignoring his interruption, "I wish—I am calling up to beg for—for a little more time. I know I have no right to ask it of you, Mr. Hemment, but you have been so kind to me in the past, and if—if you knew the great injury that the publication of the story at the present time would do to—to some one who is very dear to me, I feel sure that you would not refuse to do whatever you can to have it suppressed."

Hement smiled sardonically. He was not entirely unmoved by her evident distress, but he could imagine Underwood—

and possibly Lestrade, too—standing beside her now as she sat at the telephone making this ingenuously frank appeal for more time—more time which, perhaps, they hoped to employ in hatching and executing some new scheme for getting him out of the way before he could expose their nefarious activities.

He opened the door of the telephone-booth, and, beckoning to a passing copy boy, whispered some hurried instructions to him. Then he turned again to the instrument.

"So the publication of the story would injure some one very dear to you, would it?" he remarked.

"Yes—and some one who is quite innocent of any wrong-doing," Cecilie declared earnestly. "The cause is a worthy one, Mr. Hemment. I give you my word. If you knew the circumstances—"

"Suppose you explain them to me. I am more than willing to listen. And I feel that I am entitled to an explanation."

"You shall have it—later. But I cannot tell you anything now—especially over the telephone. One never knows who might be listening in."

"Then let me come to you." Again a grim smile curved Hemment's lips. He half expected that his suggestion would meet with a significantly prompt acquiescence—that the enemy would jump eagerly at his offer to deliver himself into their hands. "Tell me where you are," he went on, "and I will come immediately."

There was a brief interval of silence; then Cecilie said, regret in her tone: "I am afraid that is impossible. I—it isn't that I don't trust you, Mr. Hemment, but my—there are others to be considered. I have given my promise not to reveal my whereabouts to anybody until—until the danger that threatens us is past." She paused. "Won't you have faith in me, Mr. Hemment, and be satisfied for the present with my assurance that the great favor I am asking of you is one that you can afford to grant with a clear conscience? Won't you believe that, and—have a little patience? I give you my word that you shall know everything later on—in the very near future, I hope."

Her pleading struck a sympathetic chord in the infatuated young man to whom it was addressed. He still suspected that she was making this appeal to him at the behest of the smooth-tongued rogue whose name she bore, but under the winning cadence of her voice his doubts of her own good faith began to give way to the conviction that she was the innocent dupe of Underwood and his sinister partner in crime—that they had lied to her, made her believe the things she had just said.

Or perhaps she was acting under compulsion. Perhaps these brutes held the whip-hand over her, and were forcing her to serve as their catspaw. Hemment's muscles tensed at that thought.

"Tell me, little girl," he said huskily, "are you quite happy? Just answer yes or no, if you daren't speak more plainly, and I'll understand."

"I should be very, very happy," came the prompt response, "if I could be assured that the *Mercury* was not going to publish that story."

"It won't be published—not for a while, at least," the newspaperman assured her. "But is that all—the only thing that is worrying you?"

"Absolutely. Thank you ever so much, Mr. Hemment. I wish I could tell you how greatly you are placing me in your debt by that promise, and what a big load you have taken off my mind. Now I can go to sleep without a care in the world."

"You won't tell me where you can be reached?"

"I mustn't. I am awfully sorry. But you shall hear from me again when—when it is safe. Until then, *au revoir*—and once more many thanks for all your kindness."

Hemment started to say something else, but realized that he was trying to talk over a "dead" wire. The girl had hung up.

He crossed the room to the office switch-board, presided over by an auburn-haired young woman, the night operator, to whom he had recently sent some hurried instructions, via a copy boy.

"Did you get it, Miss Reilly?" he asked eagerly.

The young woman nodded.

"She was talking over 'long distance.' Central says the call was from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The number was six-five-nine-J-three Fairview."

"Good work!" the reporter approved, making a note of this information. "Fairview, eh! That's a suburb of Harrisburg. I was out there some years ago on the Rossman kidnaping case." He frowned meditatively. "I believe you used to work for the telephone company, Miss Reilly, before you came to us?"

"You said it. I put in five years at the Beekman exchange. That's where I got these gray hairs."

Hemment smiled at this pleasantry. "I suppose you still have some friends there—enough of a pull to be able to find out the

name and address of the Harrisburg subscriber that number belongs to, without going through a lot of red tape?"

"Sure; I guess I could do it. It may take a little time, though. The information would have to come from the other end. Must you have it right away?"

"As soon as possible, please. I'll wait down here until you get it, no matter how late it is."

Hemment was walking away when Miss Reilly called him back. "Just a minute! There's somebody else wants you on the wire. Party named Oglivie. Says you left word for him to call you up."

"Tell him I've changed my—tell him I've gone home," the newspaperman whispered.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

LIFE'S HEROES

NOT in books, dressed up and labeled,
 Not upon the mimic stage,
 Not in myth and legend fabled
 Far down history's dust-dimmed page;
 But in flesh and blood they battle
 On the firing-line of fate,
 Where the bullets hiss and rattle
 In the war of love and hate.

Not alone in song and story,
 Not alone in pictured art,
 Not alone where laud and glory
 Crown the brow and glad the heart;
 But in haunts remote, sequestered—
 There, too, hero souls have birth,
 Where the sore of sin has festered,
 And life means a hell on earth.

In the mines and on the prairies,
 On the sea and on the land,
 Smiling at fate's wild vagaries,
 Laughing at death's beckoning hand—
 Every hour some hero passes
 To reward of hero souls,
 While time's long and waving grasses
 Blot his name from earthly scrolls!

Clarence Urmy.

The Car of His Dreams

by
George M. A. Cain



"DEMONSTRATION?" Most certainly!" Ora M. Darrow, owner of the Imperial Garage, smiled unctuously. "And I'll give you a kid to run it that knows more about that Master-son than the man who built it ever found out. Hey, Lizzie!"

An undersized, loose-jointed, overalls-and-grease decorated youth slouched from the repair-room which formed the rear half of the automobile stable just off Newark's Clinton Avenue. Young Dr. VanCourt was the first man motor-foolish enough to ask for a demonstration of the big old Master-son Six runabout in the three months it had worn its "For Sale" sign. But he was not too green to get the significance of Riley's sobriquet. The boy was not "Lizzie" because of any resemblance to anything feminine; they were just shortening his name by taking off the descriptive prefix "Tin." Lizzie Riley was as nearly a flivver as anything human could be. He simply would not let you escape the notion that he had been produced right in Henry Ford's shops some six years of hard usage back.

A moment Lizzie looked at the prospective purchaser of the antique runabout. There was a dull something in his too pale blue eyes and on his rather wizened features which made Dr. VanCourt wish he were at the other end of the demonstration

ride. Ora M. Darrow did not see anything of it; could not have understood it if he had seen it.

Only vaguely Darrow knew that Lizzie Riley liked the ancient car so well that it had been completely overhauled, varnished, and put into perfect running order, after nine years of dead storage—all in Lizzie's free time, and at no further expense than the price of the varnish and four second-hand tubes to replace the age-rotted old ones in the tires. He thought Lizzie would be proud to have found some one to whom to exhibit the results of his handiwork.

"Lizzie, just show the doctor what this car will do," Darrow bade him.

The look of dumb misery went suddenly hard on the face which was plenty hard for its years, anyhow.

"Sure," Lizzie Riley muttered, and reached for the heavy crank. Inwardly he was alleging to himself that he would show something all right, all right.

II.

ORA M. DARROW, proprietor of the Imperial Garage, was the kind of man who turns genius into money. He knew genius when he saw it, and he saw it in Lizzie Riley. Something had told him at the very beginning that Lizzie was one of those born human pieces of garage equipment who

know by instinct most of the things it takes ordinary men ten years of experience to learn after a course in a trade school. All American boys are potential chauffeurs. About one in ten thousand is a potential motor-genius. At eight, that one can name all the cars on the road by the sound of their engines' exhausts. At ten, he can tell what ails a car by the smell behind it. At twelve he may not know why a magneto gives a spark, but he knows at a glance why one doesn't. At fifteen he could unscrew the last bolt of a twin-six, stir the parts on a garage floor, get them all back in and start the outfit running again.

From fifteen on—well, a boy like that in a garage is a gold-mine. He will work for the love of it. Given two days and two dollars' worth of second-hand parts, he will make fifty dollars' worth of junk into two hundred worth of used car. In ten thirty-cent hours, he will do a job of overhauling on which no conscientious proprietor need scruple to charge for a week of a man and helper's time.

Darrow knew the value of Lizzie's sort of genius. Five minutes after Lizzie had entered the Imperial's office on the fifth of last March, sold its owner an afternoon *Ledger*, and then asked if the place did not need a boy—he was on his way to wash the service car at the rear of the big front room where the stored cars stand. He was hired and happy. His heart sang that he was going to work thenceforth on "Autos." Good autos, bad autos, new ones, old ones—he could work on any of them with a soul full of love.

Two weeks after the acquisition of Lizzie, Darrow's night man had suffered an attack of I. W. W. and quit work. The alacrity with which Lizzie accepted the offer of an extra dollar a week and the use of the bed in the loft, gave Darrow an uneasy feeling that he was wasting the dollar. He consoled himself with the knowledge that Lizzie was cheap at any price. The boy was not one in ten thousand; he was one in a million.

From then on things had begun to happen to the Masterson Six roadster. Morning after morning the track of its broad, flat tires showed on the oily floor over

which Riley had pushed it to the shop at the rear and back again. Its faded paint then burst overnight into the brightness of a new coat of varnish. Four used and patched tubes were surreptitiously replaced by practically unused, but utterly rotten ones, on the racks of second-hand rubber in the loft; and the old car's tires stood up round and firm.

A month's inspection proved to Darrow that the inflated tires were getting no road use. He grinned. About the last of April he spent three hours of waiting, twenty minutes of interested listening, and ninety-odd seconds of testifying in court. Then he had come back to the garage, got out a card with "For Sale" painted on it. He had hung this by a string to the aged star-boarder's radiator cap.

"If you get a little spare time," he mentioned to Lizzie, "you might tune up that old junk a bit." He grinned as he said it. He knew the car was in shape to sell. And he was not out of pocket five dollars on the job.

Had he known how nearly he had come to making a thief and losing a car, he might not have grinned as he did when he ordered Lizzie to put the machine over a road test, and watched it roar away up the street and out of sight. But he had not known, and Lizzie had somehow triumphed over temptation.

No more had he known the ecstasies of agony with which Lizzie, during the days that had followed, had viewed the mere approach of a stranger to the end of the garage where the old monster stood. Eventually, though, Lizzie had grown calloused. He had got so that he could even see men pause and stare at the sign on the Masterson radiator, without experiencing a somersault of the works in the pit of his stomach. Nobody really wanted it—nobody but Lizzie.

By mid-August young Riley had laid away ninety-eight of the first hundred dollars of the Masterson's price. It seemed that he had learned all the ways there are of saving. Inside the first week he had discovered that sandwiches are more nourishing and less costly than pie or cake. He was but a little later in learning that a loaf

of bread at fifteen cents, and a quarter's worth of boiled ham made more eating than a dollar would buy at the cheapest lunch-counter. The temptation of good clothes he resisted easily. That of cigarettes he overcame to such extent that he got on with occasional "secor'is" rescued from the gutter and still more occasional whole smokes furnished by customers of the garage. His fellow workmen rarely offered a "pill" to one who never had on him so much as "the makings" with which to return the treat.

And Lizzie had always enjoyed holding his own with his kind in the matter of generous spending. Now he suffered in silence the ignominy of a tight-wad, on top of the unpopularity of a workman who sets too high production standards in a shop. At times he endured open hostility. At other times he found it even harder to endure the thought of the glorious celebration a man could have on a hundred dollars.

But the big roadster stayed to steady and strengthen him, while he learned the great lesson of waiting for his reward—the lesson that makes the ultimate difference between mere spenders and men able to spend. But not learning it too well—it must be admitted that Lizzie Riley planned wild extravagances against the time when he should have become the owner of the object of his desire.

It was in the first week of September that Dr. VanCourt's visit took place. The young man was so very medical looking as to give away the fact of his having barely hung out his shingle. He wanted a car that looked as if money were no object to compare with his necessity for haste. He wanted such a car for as nearly no money at all as he could get it. Darrow led him straight to the Masterson roadster. And Lizzie, glimpsing what was on, had listened shamelessly and in terror to the ensuing conversation.

"A trifle old-fashioned looking," the garage man had admitted gracefully—"but a rich man's car at that."

"It looks as if its owner could afford another if he didn't prefer his old one," the young doctor averred. He seemed to Lizzie to want to sell himself the outfit.

"That's the idea, doctor—exactly!" Darrow was beaming. "If I saw a doctor getting about in that car, I think I'd figure he'd been already well up in his profession a good while ago, and so busy he hadn't had time to select a new car since."

III.

As Lizzie headed, with the prospect, for open country, he answered in monosyllables the too interested queries of the physician. His throat was in the way of his voice; and his mind was busy with the idea that had made him look harder than usual. This young doctor might be the wisest ever about the human mechanism; his questions confirmed the boy's suspicions that he knew less about motor-cars than Lizzie had known at five. If it came easy to Lizzie to get the best possible performance out of a machine, about the one thing easier would be to make that machine perform so that a green man would know for sure that it was a worn-out wreck. About four miles out of town, far enough to make a trying, tedious affair of limping home with an engine, which, having worked the graphite-doped oil out of its cylinders, had nothing left in it but stalls and rattles—discouraging things would begin to happen with that Masterson Six. But—

"I suppose the car will make thirty-five or forty miles on an open, level road," the doctor hinted. And a spasm of something akin to mirth began to work havoc with the gloom in Lizzie's system. He had nursed the speedometer to sixty-five on that memorable, tempting trial spin he had had. He gave a long look down the straight length of Elizabeth Avenue. It was nearly noon of a midweek day—the hour of least traffic and least vigilance of motor police.

"I ain't never drove her before but once. Ya might watch the speedometer. She might make thirty-five." He managed to keep his laugh out of the words.

Even he was surprised at the regular leap with which the big brute of steel responded to the urge of his fingers on the spark and throttle levers. It seemed as if the speedometer jumped to sixty miles so suddenly that it was left oscillating, yet

never getting back to sixty, but hopping on and on. A moan of joy so intense it hurt came from the parted lips of the boy with his eyes on the white-gray blur of shining road. Then, with a quick jerk of his fingers, he had the great thing down to a gentle walk. They passed a policeman leaning on a motorcycle, over which he glared at the big old machine suspiciously, until he sighted the face of the kid chauffeur, who waved to him in greeting so friendly familiar that he waved back. Anyhow, something on that face made him feel a year younger and a decade happier for an hour. A block past him Lizzie fairly sobbed—

“She done it! She done it! *Oh, baby!*”

“What did she do?” the doctor asked faintly.

“Wasn’t you watchin’? It was eighty—*eighty!* Oh, boy!” Another test, that of a real motorist, occurred to him. They were dropping to the culverts under the two railroads at Elizabeth’s main stations.

“Watch ’er eat that little hill,” he admonished, turning short to the right. Over the cobbles was a thick coat of mud, dragged up from the eternal pools under the arches. Lizzie had not thought of the hill test quite in time for all the needed slowing; the car took the turn with a long skid that missed the narrow curb and the wall by inches. To Lizzie’s mind, skidding is the base-sliding of the automobile game. He did not hear the gasp of his passenger, as he bent to the task of nursing up an actual gain of speed on high gear in the short, steep climb to the Jersey Central station.

“That,” he announced joyously at the top, “is my idea of a auto!” His heart seemed swelling with an unutterable feeling that throbbed in harmonic unison with the soft puffing of the exhaust as they crawled, without a shift to lower gears, at a five-mile pace, across the plaza. Then he remembered. This man beside him wanted to buy the car. Lizzie recalled the plan he had almost forgotten.

Somehow it struck him with a mean jolt. He could not define the sentiment; he knew nothing with which he might compare it. There was no putting of the car through

its paces on the way back to Newark. Lizzie’s driving was very moderate for him, because he was giving no heed whatever to the driving he was doing at any given moment of the run. Again and again he selected a spot a little ahead, where he would stop to pretend to tinker with things he had made seem to go wrong. Again and again his fingers tensed for a too sudden push of the spark lever that would set the motor pounding. Again and again he prepared for the slight wiggling of his foot which would give all the semblance of an untrustworthy clutch. Almost anything would fool the boob beside him.

Then—he brought the car to a gentle stop exactly in front of his smiling employer before the entrance to the Imperial Garage. A moment he stared dully into Darrow’s face, as if to get from it some answer to the questions surging in his brain.

Why—why hadn’t he done it? Why hadn’t he tickled the switch in and out to put the motor on the skip and jump? Why hadn’t he slipped the emergency brake to a drag that would make it appear the engine hadn’t power to pull the car? Why hadn’t he done any of the things he might have done to scare this doctor into a run after the sort of flivver the dubb was fit to drive?

He hadn’t—hadn’t done a thing but show this simp with her price all the old Masterson could do. He had sold her; that was what he had done. Nobody could help buying her after the demonstration he had given. Nothing else to it—the car was gone. Gone!

He got to the curb, past Darrow, through the big room and through the shop, out to the back yard full of unassorted junk awaiting the next visit of a buyer of old iron. He sat down on a pile of frayed seat cushions and stared wretchedly at the brick walls.

“I couldn’t—I couldn’t,” he groaned—“couldn’t make—a bum—outa her—after she done eighty! Oh, Gawd! An’ now she’s gone!”

“Hey, Lizzie! Where the—”

Lizzie jumped. His boss’s tone had never been so irate or such utter music to his ears. He fairly ran to the front of the

garage, to his employer standing beside the old Masterson roadster—alone.

And then the vast joy that choked in his throat, filmed his eyes, rang in his ears, pounded in his chest—died aborning. Darrow's bitter imprecations turned into directions—

"Take the double-dashed junk out in the back yard," the boss bellowed, "and we'll give her one more chance. Get the front seat we took off the old Panhard, and that wagon-box and tank off that one-lung Cadillac. Take off those dinky little circus chairs and that gas-drum. Maybe we can use that for oil.

"It's a cinch anybody who's wise enough to make a truck out of her knows too much to buy her. Mebbe, if we fix her up ourselves, we'll catch some sucker who'll get the blank blank blank to Hades out of our way."

Lizzie was a Riley. The Rileys are the descendants of fighting kings. There's been a bad mistake in breeding, when a Riley will not take a long, long chance in a scrap. But, when he knows there is no chance at all—a Riley knows enough to hold his hand and his tongue. Lizzie ran the car through to the yard of junk from which he had just come.

The alternative would have been the loss of his job and the leaving of the Masterson to its fate. Besides, the end of this last seance with cold despair had left him with a new confidence, a hunch that, having been true to his big steel sweetheart all through, the outcome was as good as settled. But, if you can imagine a real Kentucky colonel hitching a thoroughbred to a pedler's cart, you will get about the right idea of the boy's feelings as he helped to carry out the orders.

The following week and the next after that did but confirm him in his faith in destiny. Nobody had given the big-hooded, little-bodied delivery outfit a second glance. To Lizzie's eyes the combination was so grotesque as to be safer than ever from buyers. Then—it happened.

Because Lizzie Riley was about three times as apt as either of Darrow's full-fledged mechanics to bring in a crippled car on its own power, he was sent up nearly to

Morristown with the service-car and a coil of rope to use if he must. The rich old owner of the disabled automobile had been doing his own driving but a few days, and did not know what the trouble was. Lizzie knew after one glance under the hood. He backed the service-car around, and got out the rope. A broken crank-case cannot be mended on the road.

Towing is hardly a sadder job for the man in the rear car than for the one in front, unless the latter owns his garage. Lizzie's spirits only came back to something like the quiet cheerfulness which had sustained him of late, as he turned the corner to the Imperial Garage.

A sudden chill smote him. His eyes bulged a little; his lips fell apart as his jaws sagged open. The old Masterson Six roadster was at the curb in front of the garage. A man, the back of whose clothes Lizzie had never seen before, was sitting at the wheel. Eddie Schuler, the other "helper," was just crawling from under the new number-tag he had affixed to the rear axle. Before Lizzie could drag the heavy car behind him up the slight grade, a second man was in the seat beside the strange driver in the Masterson. The second man lifted a hand in a slight wave of farewell to Darrow, standing on the office step. With Lizzie still a hundred feet back, the big old roadster sprang forward. The speed, just short of that for a skid or an upset, with which the next corner was turned, told Lizzie that the driver was one as expert and a shade more reckless than himself. And—his—car—was—gone!

Darrow came down the step and across the curb to open the door of the old gentleman's crippled machine for him. He still held the two number-plates just removed from the Masterson, while he smilingly took the customer's order to do whatever was needed. Then he came forward to where Lizzie was fumbling with a knot he could not see in the tow-rope.

"Well," the boss announced, "the old crab is gone at last. I guess they were the only birds in the world that would want her. The sons of guns wanted to run a week on my numbers. But nothing doing with those guys. See 'em?"

Lizzie only shook his head.

"Well, did you read about that bunch of garage thieves that jumped their car and let it go over the Palisades and almost into the North River this morning? And then made their getaway while the cops that were chasing them went climbing down for their dead bodies? If that ain't a pair of them, I'm guessing wrong. If there's anything more in the papers about them, with a high-powered delivery car, I reckon I'll furnish the police a close description of the old boat and the thieves too.

"Well—guess you better put Mr. Humphries's car where the old boat was. Thank the Lord, we've got her room at last, if she didn't bring but a hundred and a quarter."

Lizzie and Eddie Schuler got the crippled car into the vacant room of the old Masterson Six roadster. Lizzie did several other things before and after supper-time—pretty much the same things he always did. It is wonderful how much of our daily lives are accomplished so mechanically that we can go right on and do our work, no matter what has happened to our minds and hearts. Lizzie even did something beyond the ordinary for him. He worked right through the supper hour. But, at nine o'clock, with all the customers' cars in for the night, Lizzie went up to his room in the loft. From a certain grease-blackened slit in the bottom of his mattress, he drew out a roll of green paper, with bits of the excelsior clinging to the edges. Slowly, dully, he counted several times. Most of the times he counted just one hundred and twenty-six.

One hundred and twenty-six! He had not even the consolation of knowledge that he had done his utmost. All the while he had known that no dealer ever expected his first asking for a used car. Only with regard to the car of his own desire had his fatuous love made the suggested price seem so preposterously low as to preclude all thought of beating it down. For almost a week that roll had consisted of one hundred and twenty-six dollars; and Darrow had sold the Masterson—for a hundred and twenty-five! The bitter, bitter irony of it was too poignant for mere oaths, for groans,

or sighs. He quit counting and dully, slowly let the pieces of useless, worthless green paper fall to the floor. Then—

Oh, let's get away from this stuff. Maybe some of us were boys once ourselves. This world is sad enough without—without feeling Lizzie's pillow to see if it is all wet or not. We will just let it go by saying that Lizzie got to sleep around one or half past, and did not know how long he slept. Nobody ever does know how long he sleeps until he wakes up and sees the clock; but we'd rather say anything than try to write up the feelings of a kid who has wanted something six months, badly enough to cut down his eats for it—and then missed getting it.

Lizzie woke to his sorrows again, with a start. He had just dreamed of chasing the old Masterson in a flivver, and almost catching it on a road at the edge of a cliff, when it suddenly veered and leaped over the edge and went clattering down the rocks.

Then it struck Lizzie that he had awakened to something else than his sorrow. Quite distinctly, he seemed to have heard a muttered curse from the foot of the stairs leading down from his loft. He listened. He heard another sound.

"Aw—turn over," he groaned. "Y'er dreamin'. You won't never hear that again for real."

But he did not turn over. The door at the bottom of the stair had swung silently open, and the sound he had heard was real. And—it was the slow, soft chug of a six-cylinder motor "running idle" with just that rhythm peculiar to six-cylinder motors and the paddles of distant side-wheel steamboats.

Lizzie slipped hurriedly from the bed. A wild hope had sprung up in his sleep-befuddled brain, that the afternoon purchasers of the Masterson had already tired of their bargain, and had come back to demand a refund of their money.

The door below closed as softly as it had opened, and again Lizzie became doubtful whether he had heard anything at all. But the thought of returning the price of the old car got him to his knees on the floor, suddenly wide awake with uneasy memory

of what he had done with his savings. He felt all around over the rough boards and far under the bed.

A man may be so indifferent to money as to throw it on the floor, and yet feel a proper indignation at any one who acts on the notion that it is all right to take what he has discarded. Lizzie sprang to his feet and started down the stairs with more haste than caution. The door was not three feet from the wall switch for the lights, and he very nearly made one movement of pushing both door and switch wide open.

For a full ten seconds he stood stock still, stunned with amazement that swiftly mounted to a hardly more practical fury of wrath at what his eyes beheld in the sudden, half-blinding light. The Masterson roadster stood with its nose as close to the front door as it could stand and give room for the two big leaves to swing in. A man with a motor-cap close down over his face stood at the very center of the closed double door, his hands on the bars by which the sides pulled in. A second man had popped his head up from behind the up-raised far side of the Masterson's engine-hood, as the light flashed up. A third, as startled as the rest, dropped into the little box body an arm-load of brass sundries and tubes in cartons which Lizzie knew had come from the loft. The box was already piled high with casings tied down to it by the garage tow-rope.

By the end of the ten seconds, Lizzie's wrath was strongest against the man at the rear of the car. He was the one who had come from the loft, who had taken Lizzie's money from right beside his bed. Lizzie started for him, got half-way to him.

There was a muffled bang from over the big hood. Something bumped Lizzie's left leg clear from under him. He pitched forward, as another muffled bang came from the pocket of the man at the door. Lizzie thought he must have fallen into a windshield, and wondered why he could not feel the glass as well as hear its tinkle. As he opened his eyes again, the lights were turned off. He began to realize that he had been shot—the darkness proved to him that he had been killed. The sound of a shrill whistle that got so easily through the

closed doors and windows for them to have been all closed—proved nothing at all to Lizzie.

But—"Quick!—the bulls!" took his mind off his own sudden demise. He heard feet scrambling swiftly. He got the idea—

The cops were coming. And they—these dirty thieves—had flung the garage doors open wide, were leaping to the steps of the old Masterson. Two were cursing each other as they collided in their rush.

They were going—making a getaway—with all those casings and tubes and things—with his money. They were going to beat the cops out of it—they could beat any motorcycle in Newark with that old girl.

Lizzie forgot that he was dead. He discovered over again that he was hurt only, as he tried to get up. Failing that, he dragged his injured leg behind him as he started to crawl. It was instinct—the motor-instinct that was his as was the instinct to walk or to breathe air or, just now, to halt the flight of three desperate thieves—that sent him scrambling for the front of the big old car.

He reached the nearer front wheel as he heard the swift jerk of the gear lever. He dragged himself by the springs, across the front, half-way around the other wheel, while the motor jumped with the opening of the throttle. Then the clutch went in, the motor lurched forward.

The pain in his left leg turned into a million pains that wrung a fearful groan from his lips. But he clung to the mud-guard with one hand, while he felt the jerk that set him dragging over the concrete—clung, while the other hand sought and found what he wanted, closed, cupwise, over an opening that whistled air between his fingers, then ceased to whistle as he pressed over it harder and still hung fast—

And then he bumped the door-jamb, was jerked from his hold. It seemed that the rear mudguard was tearing his shoulder off. The big old car shot out. Lizzie lay still.

IV.

LIZZIE opened his eyes slowly. He felt very badly. He knew he was going to die

this time for keeps. But natural curiosity demanded that he learn something of the voices all about him.

Coppers! They'd got him into the office, and it was full of them. They'd come for him. He'd done eighty miles—with the old Masterson. He groaned.

"There!" a crisp voice spoke. "I knew he'd come around before the ambulance could get here. It's nothing serious, Darrow. A game youngster like him will be over it in a week—all but the sprained ankle. That may keep him off his feet a while."

It was the doctor from across the street who was bending over Lizzie. Dr. James kept his car in the garage. Lizzie had always imagined him a good doctor. But now—the man couldn't tell when one was dying.

"A shame he didn't get them birds for his pains!" spoke one of the men in the city's blue uniform.

"It ain't doin' so bad at that," spoke another officer—"to take their machine away from them and all the swag."

"I'd like to know how he done it. The car just got to the curb and went dead. And they jumped out and ran."

"Choked the carbureter; that's what he did," came in Darrow's voice. "It was still spilling over with juice when I got here. Trust Lizzie to know what to do with anything on wheels and a motor to it. You're sure, doc, that bullet—"

"Hasn't touched a bone. And his shoulder's just scratched."

Something was slowly percolating into Lizzie's aching brain, an idea more interesting than any of his aches. He tried to raise his head from the pillow they had laid on the floor.

"Say," he asked, with enough voice to hearten his employer a lot, "did they leave their auto—the Masterson?"

"You bet they did," some one told him. "Whatever you did to it, it died in a hurry. And we were too close for them to stop to crank it again. They didn't get away with so much as a souvenir to remember they'd run up against the toughest kid in their histories."

As usual, there was something to take

away every bit of the cheer from the joyous news. "They got my money," Lizzie mourned.

"How much, Lizzie?" Darrow's voice was fairly eager. He wanted to show up well before this crowd. The doctor was a regular customer; the sergeant of the police lived in the next street and owned a car of that age and condition which provide a repair man's steady victim. The chance was remote that Lizzie had had so much as ten dollars left of last week's pay. Darrow had always kept the notion that an uncle "Down Neck" got most of the boy's wages, since Lizzie displayed no extravagances.

"A hundred an' twenty-six bucks," Lizzie moaned. "I'd saved it to—to— Oh, hell! What's the difference—they got it. Say, doc—you got me wrong. I feel bad. Ain't the ambulance comin' here purty quick?"

"Where do you feel bad?" the doctor bluffed, trying to impart courage. Then he succeeded in giving some—"Don't you worry about your hundred and twenty-six dollars. If you can't get that for the car you took from those thieves, you can have that much worth of fun out of it. You'll be getting yourself pinched for speeding inside two weeks."

"Wh-what's that?" Lizzie succeeded in sitting right up.

"Just what I tell you. You took that car, didn't you?"

Things were doing inside Ora M. Darrow's brain. He had not quite counted on this. But—the doctor was sending side-long glances over Lizzie's shoulder; the police sergeant was eying him narrowly. Their trade was worth several times what he had taken yesterday for that old heap of junk.

Then Darrow got an inspiration. He knew that car. He knew why nobody but a reckless gang of thieves had wanted it. Between the gasoline it required for those big cylinders and the wear its weight would give tires, it was as good as a family of four to make a poor man hold his job. And—he'd been afraid of losing Lizzie every time another garage man came around the place.

"Surest thing you know, Lizzie," he

cried in a burst of generous enthusiasm that grew on him as he thought it out while he talked. "You took the car away from them, and it's yours. And you're welcome to free storage for it right here, as long as you stay—and gas and oil and tires and anything else at cost. You bet it's yours."

"And—and—can I put the old tank and seats back on her?" Lizzie fairly gurgled.

"Anything you like. I—"

The clang of a bell came from outside. Five minutes ago Lizzie had longed for the sound. He had not the usual fear of his kind for hospitals. He had been sick in one for two weeks when he was six years old; and he had got more comfort and coddling in those fourteen days than in the rest of the sixteen years of his life. Five minutes ago he had wanted, needed, ached for comfort and coddling. But now—

"Me goin' to the hospital? Where'd you get that stuff? Like hell, I will! You

can tie a rag over that bullet-hole in m' leg if you like, and don't take too long doin' it. But—ankle—sprained? Who cares. You don't need to use the clutch on that old buggy. She'll go any way on one speed. How many feet you t'ink I need for the auxiliarator? Say—youse guys gimme a pain. You'd t'ink I was dyin'.

"Say—just youse lead me out to my auto. I'll give you lief to take me to the hospital when you catch me. T'ink you could do it wit' that old truck ambulance of yourn? Say—I made eighty wit' that boat of mine a'ready. She'll do ninety the foist time I get a real chance wit' her. Youse guys don't know that machine. Oh, baby! Just let me tell the whole world that's a *car!*"

One of the policemen present was clad in khaki, with short breeches and a wheel chevron on his sleeve. But he only looked the other way and—grinned.

U U U

A MEXICAN SONG

SEÑORITA, red thy lips
 As the roses in the South;
 Is it yea or nay that slips
 Birdlike from thy dimpled mouth?
 Captive to thy sorcery,
 Cruel kindness dost thou show.
 Sweetheart, if thou lov'st not me,
 Break the spell and let me go.

Señorita, dark thy hair,
 Gleaming with imprisoned light,
 Like a subtle, shining snare,
 Tangled fast my dreams by night;
 Sleep or waking, still to thee
 All my fevered thoughts do flow;
 Sweetheart, if thou lov'st not me,
 Break the spell and let me go.

Señorita, soft thine eyes,
 Lustrous, fair, and jetty-fringed,
 Like twin stars that gem the skies
 When the dawn is rosy-tinged;
 Cease, oh, cease that coquetry;
 Teach their rays a warmer glow.
 Sweetheart, if thou lov'st not me,
 Break the spell and let me go.

Lue F. Vernon.

The Buster

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Brass Elephant," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO ROGUES.

TEN minutes later a man with a swollen, bruised face, squatting on his heels beside a small fire heard a sharp voice at his back say: "Hands up!"

The cinch-ring he had been holding in tongs of green willow dropped into the fire as the man tossed up his hands and got slowly to his feet. The owner of the voice stepped out of a patch of aspens and box-elders and walked round in front of the man at the fire.

"Lo, Swing," said the man calmly.

Swing did not relinquish the magic of the drop.

"Yuh talk like Rudy Orison," said he, "yo're about his size an' shape, but yore face ain't his—too swole up an' nubbly. Who are yuh?"

"Oh, I'm Rudy Orison right enough," said the man. "My horse drug me. Like to killed me, the—"

"Yeah," assented Swing, "I'd call him names, too, if he done all that to me. Just lemme look yuh over now—hold still, Rudy. Only one gun, huh? Yuh used to wear one in a shoulder-holster under yore vest, I remember."

"I don't no more," Mr. Orison averred huskily.

"So I see. No knife neither. Well, well, if I hadn't seen you sizzlin' up a calf's hide a while back I'd say you was reformed or somethin'. Now I guess they's no danger of accidents. Sit down, if yuh like. Make yoreself at home. I'm gonna."

Mr. Orison sank sulkily down upon his

heels. Swing Kyler sat down cross-legged. His six-shooter continued to point at Rudy's stomach.

"Are you workin' for Bill Coryell by any chance?" continued Swing Kyler.

Mr. Orison's reply was unprintable.

"Bad as that, huh? Has he stepped on yore toes or cramped yore style anywhere?"

"Nemmind what he done. An' speakin' of style-crampin', who give you that wipe over the nose and chin?"

"A dead willer branch I rode into gimme that mark," Swing explained evenly. "But speakin' o' Bill Coryell, I'll bet he's the one attended to yore face. Yeah, I thought so. Yo're cussin' thataway only makes me shorer'n ever. Aw, shut up! It don't matter. I only wanted to find out whyfor yuh was doin' Bill these lil acts o' kindness." Swing waved an arm toward the prostrate and hogtied calf.

Mr. Orison regarded him sulkily. "Whadda you care? They ain't none o' yore calves."

"I know, but why?"

"What's it to yuh?"

"Nothin' much, only—lookit here, do you really think yo're harmin' Bill Coryell by this promiscuous blottin' an' earmarkin'?"

"Whadda you mean?"

"I mean that anybody with half an eye an' that blind would know none of the Staple Box outfit earmarked that other calf I seen you blottin' a while ago or this one neither."

Mr. Orison was jolted out of his sulk.

"Why?" he demanded.

Swing told him.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 18.

Mr. Orison cursed long and steadfastly. "Hell's wheels!" he said in part. "I thought his marks was a Staple Fork in the left an' the right cropped."

"I saw you gambled on it," Swing Kyler remarked dryly. "But you should 'a' looked in the brand book an' played safe."

"I should 'a'." Mr. Orison sadly acknowledged the corn.

"You see," went on Swing, "this reverse English earmarkin' of yores is bound to make folks think."

"Yeah?"

"Shore. Even that damn fool Coombsy would scratch his head over it an' maybe get the right notion at the last of what's what. Yuh know, Rudy, in this business it don't pay to make mistakes."

"You seem to know a lot about this business."

"I've kept my eyes open," Swing said calmly.

"Uh-huh," nodded Mr. Orison, "I guess you have. Whatcha gonna do with me now?"

"I dunno," Swing told him frankly.

"That means you do know. Le's have it."

"If I let you go, Rudy, would you reform yore wicked ways?"

Mr. Orison's eyes opened wide. "Whatcha givin' us, Swing?" he demanded harshly. "You turned Sunday-school scholar yoreself?"

"I asked you a straight question," persisted Swing.

"All right, I'll say yes to please yuh."

"Wrong answer."

"So that's how it is," Mr. Orison murmured softly. "I *did* hear how you an' him wasn't friends."

"Whatever yuh heard don't matter—much. All you gotta remember is what I'm tellin' yuh now."

"I'm listenin'."

"You keep right on brandin' L Up-and-Down stock Staple Box. But get them earmarks right."

"Yeah, but—"

"But what?" prompted Swing as the other hesitated.

"Why don'tcha bushwhack Bill Coryell?"

"Is that what you tried to do?" shot back the keen question.

"Who? Me? Yo're crazy."

"Knowin' you I ain't so shore. Lemme tell you somethin', Mr. Man: Bushwhackin' Bill Coryell is no job for a amateur."

"Is that why you ain't takin' any of it?" Mr. Orison sneered incautiously.

"I dunno," said Swing, cupping a hand at his ear. "I thought you said somethin' then. Didja?"

"No," Mr. Orison denied tactfully, "I didn't."

Swing Kyler looked relieved. "My ears play me tricks sometimes. As I was sayin', Bill Coryell roosts high, an' he's got friends, more'n I thought he had."

"Then you—"

"I didn't say nothin' about me—not a word, an' I ain't gonna, an' you ain't gonna. What yo're gonna do is copy the wise old owl all you know an' change L Up-and-Down to Staple Box every chance you get."

"For what?"

"Huh?"

"What do I get out of it?"

"Well, you got a gall! Here I catch you blottin' an' let you go, an' then you wanna know whadda you get out of it. You get yore life, you coyote, an' that's all you do get!"

"Lookit, Swing. I backed down once, an' that's my limit. It gets monotonous after a while. If I'm a coyote, yo're a liar, an' if you'll gimme back my gun—" Mr. Orison looked hopefully at the man facing him.

Swing nodded with satisfaction. "If you hadn't talked back thataway I shore would 'a' left you here, Rudy. Any gent that will take bein' called a coyote is no card for my money, an' when you reneged before I was a lil disappointed—a lil disappointed. I I thought my old friend Rudy Orison had done lost his nerve complete."

"Well, how could I tell? You had the drop, an' I wasn't trustin' you none, Swing."

Swing Kyler laughed. "Here's yore gun. Put her where she belongs. I guess you an' me are seein' level now."

"I dunno." Mr. Orison wagged a dogged head as he slipped the weapon into its holster. "I'd oughta get *somethin'* out of it if

I keep neglectin' my business for yores. I was figurin' on goin' back to Buck Snort in a day or two."

"You never will go back to Buck Snort if yuh work as careless as yuh done to-day."

"A fellah's gotta take *some* chances. What do I get?"

"My Gawd, Rudy, I can't afford to pay yuh anythin'! Run off some cows for yoreself, can'tcha?"

"I ain't in the business. I'd rather have the cash."

"Cash! Cash! You must think I'm made of money."

"I know you expect to be."

"I'd like to be."

"Yeah, shore—lookit, Swing, I ain't a complete fool."

"I never said you was, did I?"

"I met Butter Nelson this mornin'."

"Didja?" Indifferently.

"I did. Rockerby was sendin' Butter to the Two Bar to tell them they found a Heart Bar Cross steer on the Rocker B range."

"Well."

"Looks like yore boys must 'a' got careless to let a steer get away on 'em like that. Aw, hell, Swing, whatsa use denyin' it? I heard about yore hirin' them gunfighters. You didn't import 'em *all* to get Bill Coryell, an' you needn't tell me so neither. Yo're engineerin' somethin' big, that's whatsamatter, an' I want in."

Swing's black eyes narrowed. "You want in, huh?"

"That's me. I can be useful to yuh, an' you can make it worth my while."

Swing considered this. "You can an' I can," he said after a space, "an' we will. On the day Lander gets to fightin' with the Staple Box you get two hundred cases."

"Two hundred cases! Say, Swing, don't strain yoreself bein' generous. I ain't a object of charity."

"Not a cent more." Firmly.

"S'pose I get Coryell for yuh?" Mr. Orison tried a new tack. "What's that worth?"

"I told yuh gettin' Bill Coryell is no job for a amateur."

"I can get him—even if I ain't downed as many sports as some people."

"An' get yoreself caught in the act or later, which is just as bad. I have my reasons for not wantin' Bill's cashin in to look like a murder."

"It's been reported that Slow Baker was shoutin' round how Coryell was gonna be got."

"He *was* shoutin' round. He ain't now. Don't worry about Coryell. He'll be attended to, but it 'll be fixed so even a fire-escape can't smell nothin' wrong."

Mr. Orison scratched his head a moment. "Nothin' wrong, huh? You mean so nobody can point any fingers at you *after* Bill is dead an' buried."

"Well, I wouldn't want 'em to, would I?"

"No," assented Mr. Orison, "no, yuh wouldn't. Them kind o' things look bad—special bad to Eastern folks."

"Eastern folks?"

"Have you seen the girl Bill has with him?"

"Yo're guessin' again," said Swing.

"Yeah? Butter told me how *folks* was sayin' yuh went to the Two Bar four times to see her."

"Folks is off as usual. I went once—on business."

"Did she leave the next day?"

"Yuh think yuh know a lot."

"I know somethin' anyway. Aw, hell's fire, Swing, don't act so mousy with me! I've been to see her, too."

"You."

"Me—We, Us & Co.—while they was camped at Buck Snort."

"So that's why Bill Coryell wrote his signature on yore face, huh?"

"He never wrote it with no whip, anyway," Mr. Orison said unexpectedly.

Swing's black eyes hardened. "I told you I got that slash over the face ridin' through some alders."

"It was a willer branch—a dead one, you told me first," tossed back Mr. Orison, then laughed aloud at Swing Kyler's discomfiture. "Don'tcha care, Swing," he went on smoothly. "You had a lil fun with me, an' I was just havin' a lil fun with you. Turn about's fair enough. It's a go about that two hundred dollars."

"I said so," Swing nodded.

"It ain't much, but if I can get the girl I'm satisfied."

"You get the girl—that red-haired girl?"

"Shore—who else? An' why not? Besides bein' pretty, she's got money. I like pretty girls an' I like money. Tit-tat-toe, there y'are."

It was Swing's turn to laugh. "You got about as much chance o' marryin' her as a red-legged duck."

"You think so? Different here. I know them Eastern petticoats—they ain't like dance-hall floozies, Swing."

"Ain't they? I thought they was."

"No, they're scared to death o' scandal, they are, the Eastern outfit. All I gotta do is get this girl off by herself a lil while. She'll marry me. Hell, yes. She'll be glad to."

Swing Kyler fixedly regarded Mr. Orison. He was thinking that a bullet rightly placed between the gambler's eyes would improve the fellow's looks immensely. It would afford him—Swing Kyler—a certain amount of pleasure to so place that bullet.

"Suppose I wanted the lady my own self," suggested Swing Kyler.

"Too late. I wasn't meanin' to tell yuh so soon, but that claim has already been staked an' recorded by yores truly. My Gawd A'mighty, Swing!" added Mr. Orison, tucking his hands into his arm-pits and rocking on his heels. "I spent a whole evenin' with her till one o'clock in the mornin' in a draw back o' the camp. *One o'clock in the mornin'*, I tell yuh, an' you know what—"

Mr. Orison abruptly ceased speaking and pitched forward on his face. A trickle of blood ran down the outside edge of the sweat-band of his hat. Swing leaned forward, his every muscle tense. A thin wisp of smoke spiraled upward from the muzzle of his poised six-shooter.

The quarter-breed, satisfied at last that nothing further was to be expected on the part of Mr. Orison, stood erect and ejected the empty shell. He slipped in a fresh cartridge and dropped the six-shooter into its holster. Then he set about gathering sticks for Mr. Orison's fire, which had smoldered out.

While the cinch-ring was heating he elimi-

nated the incorrect earmarks of the calf by cropping both ears. Then he grubbed the cow's ears. Later, with the red-hot cinch-ring he changed the L Up-and-Down brand borne by both animals to Box H Box. After which he stamped out the fire, turned loose the calf and its mother and rode away northward.

The sun was rising when the right leg of Mr. Orison gave a slight twitch. Within ten minutes Mr. Orison sighed deeply. A minute later he grunted and both legs straightened convulsively. He rolled over on his back. His eyelids fluttered. They opened and shut. One hand clawed the grass.

Slowly, painfully and jerkily he sat up. He looked dazedly round him. There was his horse, dozing on three legs, muzzle almost touching the ground. There were the scattered white ashes and charred sticks of his branding-fire. But the cow was gone, the calf was gone, and the sun was acting queerly.

"First time I ever seen the sun set in the east," Mr. Orison fretted, and raised a hand to his aching head.

The hair above his right ear was matted into stiff points. As his poking fingers investigated, the torn scalp began to sting and ooze a little fresh blood. The blood that had been first to flow had dried and stiffened in a splatchy red varnish on his temple and cheek-bone. He looked down at the ground. There was more of that red varnish on the grass. The fog obscuring Mr. Orison's brain split and blew away.

"Yeah," he said aloud, "Swing was here. I remember now. He was here, an' I said somethin' or other about that damn girl an' he cut down on me. Guess he thought he downed me all right. Yeah, Swing Kyler, the lousy breed. An' that sun ain't settin'. It's risin', an' I been here all night."

He got to his feet with a scramble and a lurch, and promptly fell down. His stiffened legs refused to bear him upright. Swearing softly, he fell to rubbing his recreant muscles. Minutes later he crawled on all fours to his horse. Mounting cost him a painful struggle, and when he was in the saddle he rocked and swayed with the splitting pain in his head.

"Yeah," he muttered as he headed eastward at a walk, "Swing Kyler likes her, does he, and he wants me to start trouble between Coryell an' the L Up-and-Down, huh? Trouble!"—here Mr. Orison chuckled crazily—"trouble! Oh, yeah, I'll make trouble, you bet! But before I'm through Bill Coryell won't be the only sport a-step-pin' high, wide, an' handsome."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAN-HUNTERS.

MISS ROWLAND and Coryell were not more than five miles from the camp on Buck River when the latter glimpsed several dots on a flat ahead. He squinted up his eyes. The mouth beneath the stubby black mustache hardened. For he knew the dots were horsemen, and twelve horsemen riding together meant nothing else than a posse. Coryell was suspicious of posses, especially posses of unknown origin and make-up.

He put out a detaining hand. "Le's wait a shake, Miss Rowland."

She looked at him questioningly. Following his steady stare her own eyes picked up the riders ahead. But she could not make them out definitely. She thought they were cows, and said so.

Coryell shook his head.

"Riders all right," he told her. "I dunno who they can be." He waited a minute or two longer, then said: "They's a draw ahead of us. We'll drop down into it."

"What's the matter?" she asked as they rode on.

"I dunno."

"What are we going into the draw for?"

"Them riders over yonder may mean anythin', but one thing is shore, an' that is they're lookin' for somebody."

"What does it matter? You're not the somebody."

"That's what I dunno. I dunno what's happened in Buck Snort since I left camp."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I wanna get back to camp an' see what news they is before I meet any posses."

Miss Rowland looked frankly bewildered. "But you haven't done anything wrong."

"The posse mightn't think so."

"But—but I don't understand. Why mightn't it think so?"

"It's a way posses have," he fobbed her off.

"But what are you afraid of?" she persisted.

"Elephants—pink ones—rattlesnakes an' dynamite caps. I seen a feller sit down on one once. He was shore a surprised-look-in' feller after. Hold him short goin' down the bank, ma'am. Them lil round rocks is mean to ride over. I've seen a hoss plant his hoof on one no bigger'n a short drink of whisky, an' the next thing hoss an' man was kerslopped all over the landscape."

When they swung to the left at the bottom of the draw she turned in her saddle and faced him determinedly.

"Tell me what's up," she demanded quietly. "I want to know."

"I wish you wasn't with me," said he uncomfortably. "I got a sneakin' idea—" He broke off. "Le's boil the kettle a lil faster."

They rode hard for a mile. The jouncing and the rush of the wind forced her to stop talking. But it gave her time to think.

"That Orison man," said she, when they slowed up to a walk, "is he capable of lying about you? Oh, you can laugh! I think you're horrid!"

"I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. But you're askin' if Rudy Orison was able to lie struck me as a heap funny. I s'pose you might as well know that Rudy wouldn't stop at lyin' if a feller was unpopular with him. An' I ain't exactly so's to be one of Rudy's best friends."

"Then you think these men ahead may be one of Orison's schemes to get even with you?"

"I dunno. I dunno nothin'. But in about five minutes we'll know for shore whether they're out for anybody."

"How will you? Why, those men are miles away."

"Shore, they are," he assented, marveling that she could not see what was perfectly obvious to him. "But they seen us. Our background was just right. They couldn't

help it. Aw right, we're ridin' toward 'em. All of a sudden we drop out of sight into a draw. When we don't show up on the level beyond it they'll know we're ridin' the draw one way or another. An' they'll split an' ride to head us off—if they're lookin' for anybody. If they ain't they won't split."

When they reached the end of the draw and came out upon a stretch of level ground where a lone pine grew among red willows and a little stream ran murmuring, they halted to let the horses drink. Coryell dismounted and handed his reins to Miss Rowland.

"Yank Ranger's head up when he's had fifteen-sixteen swallows," he directed. "Yore cayuse the same. I'm gonna climb that pine."

The lowest branch of the pine-tree was ten feet from the ground. Coryell took a little run, hopped into the air and grasped the branch. With a mighty swing and a sidewise twist of his tough-muscl'd body he got a leg over the branch. He levered himself astride it, reached out for the branch next above, and went to the top like a man climbing a ladder.

Miss Rowland watched the ease of his performance with kindling eyes. Possessing a healthy strength herself, she keenly admired the quality in others. It was not the first time he had given evidence before her of his strength. Involuntarily she thought of the time he had carried her out of the Palace at Whistler's Rest. Her breath came a little faster.

"I'm not," she whispered between her teeth. "Ridiculous!"

"Say, Miss Rowland," Coryell called down from the tree-top, "do yuh wanna founder them hosses?"

Starting guiltily, she jerked the two equine noses out of the water, and with unnecessary violence backed their owners out of temptation.

"See anything?" she asked, looking up at Coryell.

"Not yet," he replied, wondering why her cheeks were so red. "They's a ridge stickin' up in the wrong place. Couldn't see the blame thing from where we was before. But they'll pass it one way or another in a minute."

Coryell, standing close to the trunk like a sailor on the cross-trees, kept his eyes pinned on the distant ridge. Most heartily he wished Miss Rowland elsewhere. The present situation was certainly not one for a girl. There might be shooting. No, he decided instantly, there would be no shooting. He would, if matters came, as he expected, to the push of the pike, obviate that danger by surrender.

"Maybe I'm takin' too much for granted," he said to himself, when ten minutes passed and the ridge remained as blank as a new-built wall.

He was not taking too much for granted. Thirty seconds later a speckling of dots trickled into view beyond the western shoulder of the ridge. Four dots. There were no more. And no others followed. The four appeared to crawl. But he knew that they were riding for all their horses were worth. They were heading, he thought, toward the southern end of the draw he and Miss Rowland had just quitted.

Two minutes later a dot began to slide down the face of the ridge. Another, a mile to the left, followed. Then two an equal distance to the right of the first one. There were trees growing at the eastern end of the ridge. He could not see what was occurring beyond them. He lowered himself hurriedly to the ground.

"They're after us all right," said he to Miss Rowland, topping his mount. "We'll fox 'em."

She nodded, and they spurred into a gallop. Coryell's objective was a rolling fold two miles away. Beyond it were hills, and beyond those hills lay the long, dark bulk of Buck Mountain. At the right of Buck Mountain lay the camp.

They were in the open now, riding across the advancing line of horsemen. Of course they, too, were plainly visible, but there was no help for it. The eight in sight gave Coryell little cause for worry. He felt reasonably assured that he could outdistance them. But the quartet for whom his eyes had not yet accounted presented a totally different problem. If they had cut in at once toward the trees growing at the eastern end of the ridge it would be no more difficult to elude them than the others. But if

the four had elected to ride well to the east first Ranger and Miss Rowland's horse would have to be pushed to the limit of their speed and endurance. A narrow squeak, that is what it would be, but he and the girl would nose it out. He had been lucky at a pinch in the past. Confidence in his own destiny did not desert him now.

Suddenly Miss Rowland began to laugh. Fearing hysterics, he stared in alarm.

"Whatsa matter?" he shouted above the roaring drum of hoofs.

"All of this!" she yelled back, waving an indefinite arm. "It's so different from home!"

Thank the Lord she wasn't going to have hysterics. Yet, what there was to laugh at in the present situation he could not see for the life of him. Different from home! No doubt she found it thrilling.

The fold for whose shelter they were heading was three-quarters of a mile away when moving specks appeared in the open beyond the trees.

"Told yuh!" he exclaimed.

"What?" she called.

He shook his head. "Nothin'," said he. "Don't lay back against the cantle that-away. Kills his action. Ride his shoulders more. Lookit me. An' slack yore rein a li'l bit. He don't need holdin' up none. All you wanna do is feel his mouth—just feel it."

His voice was perfectly calm. He might have been telling her the time of day. She turned her head and smiled at him.

"Isn't this glorious!" she cried. "I'm having the time of my life! Do you think they'll shoot?"

"I won't give 'em a chance. If I see they ain't no chance of makin' it we'll stop an' be good, you bet. But it won't come to that. We're goin' fine, an' once we get behind that swell yonder I know a way round. Look out now. They's some mighty tough goin' past that red boulder ahead of us. Ground slopes, an' they's a scatteration of rocks. We'll have to go slow."

He would never have slowed down for a mere rock-covered slope had he been alone, and she knew it. "Go slow nothin'!" rang out her ungrammatical shout, and she swung her quirt cross-handed as

she had been taught. "You're not going to do any stopping on my account, Mr. Man!"

At this in alarm he reached for her rein, but she twitched her mount's head away and reversed her quirt in a flash.

"Don't you dare touch my horse!" she blazed. "Stop it, or I'll break your arm!"

It was not the fear of her poised quirt that gave him pause. The red boulder was over Ranger's flattened right ear. The rock-strewn slope was almost underfoot. Coryell stood up in his stirrups.

"Don't try to guide him!" he bawled. "Ease up a li'l, for Gawd's sake! Let him pick his way! Let him—good Gawd A'mighty!"

It occurred and was past in one sickening instant. Miss Rowland's horse made a misstep, stumbled, staggered, and came down crash on his nose. The girl shot from the saddle, turned a somersault and struck on her head between two rocks.

Coryell dragged Ranger, plunging and rearing, to a standstill. He slid to the ground and ran and knelt beside the huddled, motionless figure of Miss Rowland. Her head was twisted so that her chin rested on her shoulder. The one eye that he could see was closed. A lumpy bruise on her forehead was already purpling.

His heart pounding painfully, himself trembling like the proverbial aspen—he was literally frightened sick—he picked up the pitiful body and lifted it away from the cruel rocks. The head rolled limply over his forearm.

"She's broke her neck!" he whispered between his teeth as he laid the body down.

He had his hand on her head where the red of her hair was stained a darker shade. He brought his palm away discolored with her blood.

Suddenly he sprang erect, threw himself across Ranger's saddle and tore away northward, where a thin line of willows marked the course of a stream.

And as he rode he kept saying: "My Gawd! My Gawd!" over and over again.

He filled his hat at the stream and raced back to where she lay. Dismounting he stumbled and fell, bruising his knee against a stone, but he did not feel the pain—nor did he spill the water.

Kneeling beside her he took off his neckerchief, balled it, wet it, and lightly sponged her forehead and the top of her head where the blood was clotting the strands of her hair. The scalp wound in itself was slight. But it oozed blood. Which was what had sent him helter-skelter for the water. Because he knew that while people bled they lived. It was only when life became extinct that the blood ceased to flow.

He draped the wet handkerchief across her forehead and put his ear to her breast. Through the rough flannel of her shirt-waist he could not detect the faintest of heart-beats. In a panic that outdid his first fright, for her bleeding had raised his hopes for her life, he ripped open her shirt-waist, chemise, brassiere, and undervest and pressed his ear against her firm, white flesh. He was not certain, but—was that faint thump an actual heart-beat? He listened, but the sound did not come again, though he kept his head cramped where it was for what seemed years. In reality not more than four minutes had passed since he had torn open her clothing.

He slowly raised his agonized head, sank back on his haunches, and lifted one of her hands. It dropped limply as wet paper. With fumbling fingers he adjusted her clothing as well as he could. Her shirt-waist—the buttons had been torn off—he pinned together with one of her own hairpins. His sick heart told him that it was all his fault. He should have ridden straight to meet the posse. By endeavoring to dodge the issue he had actually murdered her.

This done Coryell batted his eyes and looked round him. There was a group of serious-faced men on horseback surrounding him and the girl. He did not know any of them. It seemed odd that he had not heard their arrival. Some of them were looking at him, others were looking at the girl.

"First time I ever seen a red-haired girl that tanned," remarked a practical-minded person, producing a plug of tobacco from his bootleg. "Mostly they freckle."

"Is she dead?" another, a plumpish man, asked Coryell.

"I dunno," he replied dully. "I—I guess so."

"Don't her heart beat none?" pursued the plumpish man.

The plumpish man slipped wheezingly from the saddle. From the breast-pocket of his shirt he fished a gold watch attached to a rawhide guard.

"We'll hold this to her nose," said the plumpish man. "Sometimes when you think they've cashed yuh can see their breath on the glass."

"Give it here!" Coryell, in his flurry forgetting that he had a watch of his own, tore the watch from the hands of the plumpish man, clicked open the hunting-case and held the crystal to the nostrils of Miss Rowland. He took it away and held it slantwise to catch the light. A cloudy moisture filmed the glass. At sight of which Coryell, to the anguish of the plumpish man, hurled the watch upon the ground and demanded whisky.

"Hurry up!" he directed, slipping an arm beneath Miss Rowland's shoulders. "Gimme a flask somebody."

Every one dismounted, and eleven flasks—the plumpish man was profanely retrieving the elements of his watch—were proffered immediately. Coryell took the nearest, that of the practical-minded citizen, drew the cork with his teeth and held the flask under the nose of Miss Rowland.

He watched her anxiously. His eye caught a slight movement of her bosom, and he realized the surging joy of one reprieved at the last moment. She breathed! She was alive!

"Let her have a pull at it," suggested a good-natured fool. "She'll come round quick then."

"Hell, no!" exclaimed the practical one in supremest scorn. "You don't wanna strangle her. If we had a li'l water now—Piggy Question done stepped in that hatful when he went after his watch."

To which conversation Coryell gave no heed. He was completely absorbed in watching the color drifting back into her cheeks and the more and more pronounced rise and fall of her bosom. Her eyelids fluttered, opened, closed, opened, blinked, then gazed straight up into his eyes.

"What—what happened?" she asked faintly.

"Hoss fell an' so did you," said Coryell. "Landed on yore head, you did. I thought you was killed."

Her head flopped weakly. The whisky flask which he had removed when she opened her eyes, he hurriedly returned to its old position. Her nose wrinkled with disrelish, and she raised a weak hand to push aside the bottle.

"Take it away," she murmured. "It smells like ammonia."

"Here!" cried the practical-minded individual in alarm, "don't you dast to bust that bottle like you done Piggy's watch!" He whipped the flask out of Coryell's hand and set it to his own lips. "Ammonia!" he snorted, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "Ammonia! Where's that cork?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TIGER.

SHE would sit up despite all he said. And when she did she sank back against him with a moan of "Oh, my head!"

"Guess I better fix that scalp-cut yuh got," he told her gently. "One of you fellers get me some water. They's my hat."

But the four that at once mounted and tore down to the stream did not bother about his hat. They fetched water in their own. Again he wetted his neckerchief and endeavored to cleanse her wound. She winced.

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "But yore hair's so thick— It's kind o' hard."

"It's all right," she told him, white-lipped. "I don't mun-mind a bit."

"I'm afraid I'd oughta cut away some of yore hair," he submitted. "Just a li'l bit. You—you won't miss it."

She smiled wanly. "Cut away."

He took out his pocket-knife, opened the sharpest blade, and proceeded to saw out a thickish lock of her lovely hair. That done, he washed the cut and put on a compress contrived of her own white handkerchief. Then he bound up her head turban-wise with his neckerchief.

"You'll do till I get yuh to the camp," he said.

"Don't try to make me ride just yet," she begged, and turning, she stretched out full length on the ground and pillowed her head on her arm.

"Where's her hoss?" he demanded of the multitude at large, thinking of the beast for the first time since the accident.

"With ourn," replied the practical-minded man, and drenched the face of a rock through a gap in his front teeth.

"Hurt any?"

"Skinned his knees an' nose. Walks a li'l stiff."

"Oughta busted his fool neck," declared Coryell, dropping his eyes to the bandaged head on the outstretched arm.

"I wish you'd busted yores," Piggy Question averred sourly, "before you busted my watch. Fine note, that is, lend a gent yore watch an' then have it smashed all to flindereens. You must think watches grow on trees, feller!"

"Aw, shucks," Coryell grinned over Miss Rowland's head. "Whatever does a butter-bal like you want with a watch? You couldn't move fast enough to keep time with it."

"Well, it was most new," grumbled the peevish Piggy Question.

"Well, I got four bits that ain't work-in'," smiled Coryell. "I'll buy you another."

"Four bits!" squealed Piggy Question. "Four bits! Which that watch cost forty dollars!"

"They shore must 'a' seen you comin'. Next time you go to town keep away from them fake jewelry salesmen."

"Aw—"

"You've done hurt Piggy's feelin's," Coryell, declared a fatter man than the wretched Piggy, a man wearing Minnesota overalls and a bland smile. "That watch was the apple of his eye. It never lost more'n two hours a week an'—"

"Aw—" began Piggy, but the other laughed him down.

"You seem to know me," remarked Coryell to Minnesota Overalls.

"I've seen yuh," said the fat man non-committally, sliding a match across his fat leg.

"Is that my gun stickin' out o' the waist—"

band of yore pants?" asked Coryell, suddenly bethinking himself that no friendly weight dangled at his hip.

"Why, yeah," replied the fat man. "Yuh see, I took it away from yuh when yuh was busy there. It seemed safer like."

"Which is one way of lookin' at it. But why?"

"We," said the fat man, nodding round the circle of his friends, whose faces became on a sudden serious, "we are from Buck Snort."

"Tha's fine. But what has Buck Snort to do with deprivin' me of my artillery?"

"Well"—the fat man's tone was actually apologetic—"you know Coombs, the association detective, don't yuh?"

"Shore. What of it?"

The fat man's tone became even more apologetic. "Yesterday Tobe Haskins there found Coombs lyin' in some willers near the ashes of a fire. He had cashed, Coombsy had. Forty-five ninety through his heart."

"But what has Coombsy's downin' got to do with me?"

"They was a L up-an'-down cow about two hundred yards from the fire. She had burned feet an' a calf. The calf had just been branded Staple Box. You could see Lander's old brand underneath plain as plain."

"Was the calf earmarked?"

"Shore—yore earmarks."

"Mine, huh? Howdja know they was mine? Look in the brand book?"

"We didn't have one handy. But Rudy Orison told us they was yore earmarks. He remembered 'em."

"So Rudy remembered 'em, did he? How is it I don't see Rudy with yuh?"

"Rudy ain't feelin' so well. His hoss drug him an' brunkled him all up. He's sort of hangin' round his shack for a spell."

"I'll bet if you was to step inside Rudy's shack right now you wouldn't find him there, nor his hoss in the corral neither. But nemmind that. It's Rudy's memory that's interestin' me. Yeah, his memory an' my earmarks. Was that calf marked with a Staple Fork in the left an' the right cropped?"

"Shore," said the fat man.

"It just happens that my earmarks are a Staple Fork in the right an' the left cropped. So there y' are."

"Rudy said he knowed what they was," insisted the fat man, removing his hat and scratching a grizzled poll.

"It don't make a mite of difference what Rudy said. You lead me to Rudy an' le's see what he says to me."

"We was aimin' to do that," spoke up the vindictive Piggy Question.

"You here again?" grinned Coryell. "What time is it?"

"I guess we'll have to take you along anyway," cut in the other fat man. "It don't look reasonable to suppose you'd reverse yore own earmarks thataway, if they is reversed, but—"

"Look in Coombsy's brand book," interrupted Coryell. "He's got one in his warbags. I seen it."

"I didn't find the hoss when I found the body," said Tobe Haskins dryly. "You say you seen Coombsy's brand book? When did you see it?"

"Day before yesterday, in a draw back of where we're camped on Buck River. He got it out an' looked in it when him an' me found a yearlin' with the same brand an' earmarks as that calf yo're talkin' about. You see, he made the same mistake you did about them earmarks. He thought they was mine."

"H-m. You 'n him ridin' together, was yuh?" Thus Minnesota Overalls, folding his fat arms.

"No. I was in the draw first, an' he come ridin' up after me."

"He knowed you was up there, huh? How did he know?"

Miss Rowland sat up with an effort and scowled at the questioner. "He asked me where Mr. Coryell was, and I told him."

"Thank yuh, ma'am. What was yuh doin' up that draw, Coryell?"

"None of yore business," was the unexpected reply. "So long as I wasn't rustlin' nobody's cattle I guess I got a right to ride where I feel like."

"Shore," the fat man assented equably. "I ain't disputin' that, not for a minute. But rustlin' ain't right, an' a murder's a murder, so if it's alla same to you we'll ask

yuh to sort o' traipse along back to Buck Snort with us, an' we'll wrastle it out there. Them earmarks of yores will be give due consideration. You'll get a square deal," he added reassuringly.

Coryell nodded. "This lady has to go to her camp quick, an' right away, an' I'm gonna take her there—first. No harm in that, huh?"

"Not a bit. We'll be right with yuh."

"Them reversed earmarks now"—Piggy Question put in his puzzled oar—"what didja switch 'em for thataway?"

"I've heard o' fellers like that," Coryell said whimsically to Minnesota Overalls, flicking a thumb at Piggy; "but this is the first time I ever seen one outside his cage."

"Yeah," Piggy snarled malevolently, "if you ain't a rustler, what didja run away for when you seen us comin'?"

This was a point that Minnesota Overalls had not chosen to make. He shot a quick glance at Piggy Question, then looked gravely at Coryell. "Yuh did sort o' drag it, yuh know," said he.

"An' why wouldn't we?" flung back Coryell. "How'd we know who you was? You might 'a' been a outfit of rustlers or hold-ups for all we knowed. You wasn't carryin' no signs that I could see. An' I dunno as I'd believe much in signs anyway."

"I don't see no use of takin' him alla way back to Buck Snort," remarked the practical man. "It seems like a waste of time, sort of."

The significance of this was lost on Miss Rowland. "I don't either," said she.

"Shut up, Sam." Minnesota Overalls frowned and shook his head at him of the practical mind.

"I dunno but what Sam's right at that," said Tobe Haskins quietly. "You ain't asked enough questions, Fatty."

"Might as well settle it," was the opinion of a hawk-faced citizen.

"You think so," observed Fatty, snapping the suspenders of his Minnesota overalls, and rolling a pair of remarkably steady eyes upon the hawk-faced gentleman. "I said he was gonna get a square deal."

"He can get it here as well as in Buck Snort," insisted Hawk-Face.

"Save trouble," amplified the practical Sam. "Anybody can see that. I can fix it up in three minutes. Less. Tobe's right. You was too sparin' o' yore questions, Fatty."

"I say he gets his square deal," declared Fatty in a hard voice, his lips tight-drawn. "You know me, gents. I ain't in the habit of makin' rash promises."

"That's all right," nodded Sam, and worked his jaws squirrel-wise. "You'll see yore square deal, Fatty. Lookit, Coryell, it was day before yesterday you seen Coombs in that draw, huh? Yeah? 'All right then. What time?"

"I dunno exactly. Afternoon some time."

"Middle?"

"Li'l' later, I guess."

"It was yesterday mornin' early when Tobe Haskins found Coombsy's body. He hadn't been dead more 'n twelve hours, accordin' to my notion. We none of us seen Coombs after the mornin' o' the day before, the day you say you was talkin' to him in that draw."

"That makes you the last feller to see him alive, Coryell," slipped in Piggy Question.

"Why no," denied Coryell. "The last feller to see him alive was the man who downed him."

"Looks like a plain open-an'-shut case to me," a square-headed man remarked to his neighbor.

"Shore," nodded the neighbor, a slack-mouthed specimen of the tribe that invariably sees nothing but the obvious.

"Why wait?" suggested Hawk-Face, and laid a hand on his rope strap.

"Them willers yonder don't look hardly high enough," observed Coryell, fishing out the makings and proceeding to construct a nonchalant cigarette.

He lit the white roll and inhaled deeply. He blew the smoke out through his nostrils. It was unreal, that gray cloud. So were Hawk-Face, overalled Fatty, and the others. The blue of the sky was a shade that he had never seen before. There was no heat in the sunshine. He seemed to be standing at a distance gazing at himself in the midst of a crowd of men. It was im-

possible that those twelve men intended hanging the figure wearing his clothes. It could not be. It was ridiculous. He laughed aloud at the very idea. The laugh brought him back to reality with a suddenness that was almost painful.

"It's only a three-mile ja'nt to a regular tree," Hawk-Face was saying.

Fatty's hands were resting on his ample hips. Coryell blinked. The hands were no longer on the hips. They were thrust forward slightly, and each held a gun. The man's fat figure crouched and stiffened. His face had fallen into new lines. What had been an expression of calm good humor was now a mask of tigerish purpose.

"This feller don't hang to-day," the tiger declared in a burring whisper. "He gets his square deal in Buck Snort, or this deal winds up in the smoke right here."

"Yo're gettin' too pernickety, Fatty," complained Hawk-Face, removing his hand from his rope strap. "You can't run no blazer on eleven of us. You wouldn't last as long as a short drink."

"I'll take you along for a chaser," burred the grim whisper. "Don't lose sight o' that fact."

"Gentlemen," said the soft voice of Miss Rowland, "I'd like to go back to camp now, if you don't mind."

They turned as one and stared at her. In the rush of business, as it were, they had completely forgotten her.

"Why shore," said Fatty, tucking away both guns with a lightning-like movement. "We'll take yuh to camp right away."

"Shucks," said Coryell to the fat man, "I know who you are now. Yo're Fatty Larkin, Tom Jones's cousin."

"That's me," nodded the other briefly. "Better let the lady take yore hoss, an' you fork hers."

low her rest. The resting entailed the spreading of Coryell's slicker on the ground, and each occasion consumed perhaps twenty minutes. Coryell, extremely worried, suggested at the last that her aunt be sent for. But this she frowned upon—literally.

"I don't want my aunt," she told him with a scowl. "I want to be let alone. My head hurts on top, and there's a lump the size of an egg on my forehead, and one of my eyes is swelled almost shut, and I know it 'll turn black, and I feel like the very devil."

"Shucks," Coryell said helplessly. "Shucks."

The Buck Snort men stood around regarding her curiously—and quite as helplessly. Funny things, women. Gritty as a grindstone one minute, and playing the baby the next. Couldn't count on 'em at all. Nawsir.

Miss Rowland turned her scowl on the Buck Snorters.

"What are you crowding in so for?" she inquired disagreeably. "How do you expect me to breathe if you shut off the air this way?"

Which was, on the face of it, unreasonable. None of them was within twenty feet of the lady. Nevertheless they shuffled backward a few yards. Coryell started to follow.

"Not you!" she snapped irritably. "Stay where you are. Don't you suppose I want somebody near me? Well"—she went on to the others—"what are you hanging around for? I said I wanted a little fresh air to breathe. Gimme some more room, and gimme it now! Oh, don't be idiotic! How can he get away in this open country with you men surrounding him?"

At which they withdrew somewhat farther, and Miss Rowland sank back upon the slicker and threw an arm across her face. Coryell squatted down on his heels and began to build him a cigarette. A line of perplexity showed between his eyebrows. Miss Rowland was certainly acting oddly.

"Listen," Miss Rowland whispered from the shelter of her arm. "Look unconcerned about it, too."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SQUARE DEAL.

THE ride to camp was covered but slowly. Because at least a dozen times Miss Rowland complained that the continued joggling hurt her head and demanded that the cavalcade halt and al-

With his thumbnail he snicked a match alight and lit the cigarette. He pushed his hat back till it hung by a hair, and dangled the cigarette from a corner of his slackened mouth. His expression was a bored one.

"I'm going to delay our arrival at camp till after dark," went on Miss Rowland's whisper. "Then you must escape. I'll manage it somehow. I don't know yet just how, but I will. Whatever I do or say after we reach camp you must play up to. No matter what I do or say. *No matter what I do or say!* You must. Will you? Scrape your foot if you understand."

He did not scrape his foot. Instead he lowered his head as if to examine the condition of one of his bootsoles.

"Can't do it," he whispered back without moving his lips. "I'll get a square deal."

"You won't! You won't!" A note of hysteria was in her whisper. "I know better. They all think you did it—all except the fat man. You must do as I say, or—Oh, how my head hurts! You're making it worse by not doing what I want."

She raised her head and two great tears rolled down her cheeks. The head dropped back and she gave a heartbroken sigh that would have melted the heart of the Dragon of Wantley. Coryell was not the Dragon of Wantley, but he was a very human young man, and—he had held Miss Rowland in his arms.

He scraped his foot.

It was dusk when the fourteen riders came to the camp on Buck River. Two minutes later Miss Rowland was in her aunt's arms, and Coryell was sitting on a log near the fire with Smoky and Light Laurie. Armed men slouched in strategic positions round the log.

"I guess I'll have to take yore guns away," said Hawk-Face, stopping in front of Smoky Nivette.

The half-breed looked up with a flash of white teeth. "You weel not tak my gun, by gar!"

"Mine neither," quoth Light Laurie. "I'm servin' notice on you tarrapins right here an' now, that any gent tryin' to remove the gun from my premises wants to get insured first."

"It ain't hardly necessary, if you ask me." Thus Fatty Larkin poured oil on the ruffled waters.

"I ain't askin' you," said Hawk-Face.

"I know. I'm just sayin'. Just kind of talkin', sort of."

Hawk-Face looked at Fatty Larkin. Fatty Larkin looked at Hawk-Face. Hawk-Face went away from there. The removal of any one's guns ceased to be a subject of interest.

Smoky crossed his legs, tucked his thumbs into his belt, and watched Coryell's captors with half-closed eyes. Light Laurie planted his hands on his knees and glared.

Coryell's two friends were highly indignant. Smoky, beyond a muttered oath, was silent. Light Laurie was more communicative.

"Which you can't prove nothin'," declared Light Laurie. "You ain't got no witnesses; nary a witness; an' if you had he'd be a dam' liar."

"Didja never hear o' circumstantial evidence?" the hawk-faced man queried heavily.

"Hell, you wouldn't know this circum-hoozis feller yoreself if you seen him comin' along the road wavin' a red flag in each hand. You can't arrest a man this way. Where's yore warrant? Where's yore sheriff? Where's yore law for all this?"

"Now, now, cool off," Hawk-Face advised. "We got plenty law—plenty."

"Has the sheriff been sent for?" put in Coryell, knowing that he had not.

"Don't need no sheriff, an' we don't need to hang round here no longer neither. If yo're gonna eat, let yore friends rustle yuh some grub."

Smoky took the hint and set about slicing bacon. A woman glided past the fire. It was Mrs. Rowland. She crossed to Coryell and held out her hand.

"I'm sorry," she said simply.

"Don't worry," he said, gripping her fingers hard. "It's all right with me. But everythin' ain't all right with you. Butter Nelson found a steer on the Rocker B range with grubbed ears an' yore brand changed to Heart Bar Cross. He went to tell Sam Reed."

Although Mrs. Rowland realized that the discovery of one steer undoubtedly indicated the loss to her of others, she merely snapped impatient fingers.

"It makes no difference," said she. "Your trouble is all that matters now. I don't know what to do about it exactly, but I intend to send Light Laurie to Rockerby's and the L Up-and-Down now."

"Excuse me, ma'am," Hawk-Face broke in civilly, "but no messengers are leavin' till after we do."

She regarded him steadily a moment. Then she inclined her head and returned to the tent.

"What's this?" yapped the good-natured fool who had suggested, when Miss Rowland lay senseless, that Coryell give her whisky. "What's this here Heart Bar Cross? How many brands have you got, Coryell?"

This was too much. A second later four men were clinging to Coryell, and the good-natured fool was lying on his back with a broken nose.

"Serve you good an' right," Fatty Larkin told the good-natured fool when the latter sat up. "You was too brash by a jugful. Now you needn't go to pawin' at yore gun. You ain't gonna shoot nobody."

Muttering profanely, neck thrust out and head bent that he might not bleed on himself, the good-natured fool withdrew to the river. The men attached to Coryell loosed their holds. He resumed his seat on the log and winked at Hawk-Face. The latter did not return the salute.

From the tent drifted the sound of choky sobbing.

"Oh, I can't bear it!" moaned Miss Rowland.

"She'd oughta have a doctor," declared Coryell unhappily. "Maybe she's worse hurt than I thought. Light, you slide out on yore hoss."

"None o' that!" Hawk-Face rapped out decisively. "We'll have no shenanigan here. I said once we'd have no ridin' for help till after us an' you start for Buck Snort. An' that goes for doctors, too. Think yore friend can tie a hoss out in the woods some'ers, do yuh, so yuh can make a break for it, huh? You don't work no

moth-eaten game like that on us, an' yuh can stick a pin in that."

"You been readin' them dime novels," Coryell stated calmly. "An' the last thing I told yuh when I left the house was for you to leave 'em alone. Naughty, naughty, not to mind papa."

"Tsall right," grunted Hawk-Face, clicking the lever of the Winchester that lay across his knees. "Tsall right. We got you an' we're gonna keep you."

"That's right," corroborated practical Sam, as he had recourse to the soothing plug.

"Y' betcha," nodded Tobe Haskins.

"My name's Larkin," said the overalled fat man to Light Laurie. "Tom Jones of Hatchet, he's my cousin."

"I know him, an' I've heard of you, but—"

"I'm tellin' you they won't be no skulduggery in this case."

"Which I should say not," broke in Piggy Question, in whose plump chest still rankled the shattering of his watch. "We'll hang him proper with a rope."

At this juncture Mrs. Rowland pushed aside the flaps at the rear entrance of the tent. "Smoky," she called across the box-elders, "do you know where the witch hazel is?"

"I put her een de tent," replied the half-breed, squinting across the flames.

"It isn't there. Maybe it's in one of the packs. Come help me find it. Bring a lantern."

Smoky set the pan with its half-done cargo of bacon on the ground and went to the assistance of Mrs. Rowland. From the tent the sounds of grief continued. Again Miss Rowland sniffed that she couldn't bear it.

Among the pack-saddles scattered about beyond the tent bobbed the lantern. Coryell could hear faintly the voice of Mrs. Rowland laying down the law to Smoky. He gathered that the lady was ascribing the mislaying of the witch hazel to laxness on the part of Smoky. The half-breed was making no defense. Coryell could not even see him. Mrs. Rowland was holding the lantern. The flame appeared to be turned rather low.

The coffee-pot boiled over with a hiss. Hawk-Face picked up a stick and pushed the bail along the rod.

"Can't wait all night," he grumbled, and began to fry the half-cooked bacon.

Mrs. Rowland returned to the tent with the lantern. Smoky Nivette returned to the fire and took the frying-pan from Hawk-Face. The bacon was done when Miss Rowland came out of the tent. Her aunt was supporting her.

"Let me alone!" cried Miss Rowland pettishly, and quite rudely pushed away her aunt's arm. "I can walk by myself."

Slowly she walked round the box-elders. She had chosen the side near the woods. She passed behind two thick-trunked pines and paused beside them, one hand on the rough bark. Coryell knew that behind her was the gully into which it was the camp custom to throw empty tin cans, the gully that led through the woods to the draw where he had picked her violets.

Miss Rowland, beside the pine, stared at him and smiled tenderly. Tenderly? Exactly. No other word but that particular one could describe her smile. So she came to him where he sat upon the log. He rose to his feet. She took his hand. Her fingers were very cold.

"You won't mind if I talk to him in private, will you?" Her voice, as she asked the favor of practical Sam, was as sweet as wild honey. "Oh, not at any distance," she hastened to add. "Just a few yards away. You see, we're engaged to be married, and—and I wu-want to say good-by to him."

"We-well—" began practical Sam doubtfully.

"An' why not?" demanded Fatty Larkin, who had drifted up unseen. "Why can't she say good-by. You make me tired, Sam, you do. Finikin', always finikin'."

"Oh, all right," said Sam hurriedly. "I'll have my eye on yuh."

Miss Rowland turned on her heel and pulled Coryell's hand through her arm and clasped his fingers between her two palms. It may be said that she snuggled up to him.

"Don't pull away," she whispered. "We're supposed to be engaged. Try to act as if you loved me."

"I dunno as I'd have to act so awful hard at that," was his return whisper.

"Don't be silly. We're only playing."

"Shucks, I thought you told me to act as if I lul-loved yuh. I'm doin' my best. I didn't mean it. I didn't go to hurt yuh. Shucks—I couldn't love yuh on a bet. Honest."

"That makes it worse—taking it back." Here the shameless coquette tilted her head and glanced at him sidelong.

Now the firelight shone full upon her face. It revealed without mercy the scratches on her nose, the black and blue area surrounding one partly closed eye, and the purple bump on her forehead. Despite all these impediments to beauty, Coryell, looking upon her, decided that she was the best-looking thing in seven States. He caught his breath and looked away toward the river, and frowned, and mopped his forehead and his chin and his neck and looked at her again and stumbled and with quite unnecessary violence kicked a rock out of the way.

"Lordy, it's a warm night," he said.

"Follow my lead," she directed. "Each time we turn I want to be nearer those trees."

They had been walking to and fro a long ten yards from the log. The fire, Smoky squatting before it, burned between. On the log sat Practical Sam, Fatty Larkin, and Light Laurie. Piggy Question was on the ground, his plump legs stretched out, his back against the log. A rifle lay across Piggy's knees. Sam's gun was out. He held it dangling, barrel aslant. Fatty Larkin's six-shooter was in his belt. His hands were clasped round his knees.

"Fire's hot," said Fatty Larkin, and changed his seat to the other side of Light Laurie. This move brought him within inches of Piggy Question. Most of the other men of the Buck Snort contingent were sitting or lying beyond the log. They had started a small blaze of their own. Three of them were engaged in pounding coffee, and one was frying bacon in Smoky's spare pan.

Chuck!

"Sacré!" exclaimed Smoky Nivette. He had upset the pan of bacon into the flames.

Piggy Question snickered. Smoky Nivette swore again in French and got up, saying in English that he would slice off another supply of bacon. He vanished beyond the tent.

"Why do you want to be near the trees?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Because there's a fresh horse, Light Laurie's, tied to a tree right where the gully runs into the draw. Now don't say anything. I planned it all out while I was in the tent. While my aunt and Smoky were supposed to be hunting for the witch hazel, Smoky was catching up a horse and saddling him and taking him to the draw. Now Smoky's upset the bacon and he'll have to fry another batch. More delay. We're not more than five yards from the trees, now, and possibly six from the gully. When we're close to the trees I'll drop my handkerchief, and Smoky will immediately throw a heavy log on the fire from our side. The sparks will fly up in the faces of the guards at the log.

"When auntie—she's waiting among our horses now with the shotgun, sees Smoky throw the log, she will fire both barrels and scream her head off. Between the sparks and the report and the scream the guards' attention will be momentarily distracted. And all you have to do is jump down into the gully, run to the horse, and away you go. Oh, I forgot. There's a rifle on the saddle, and a six-shooter and belt hanging on the horn; bacon, coffee, salt, and sugar and tobacco in the saddle-pockets. I haven't overlooked a thing. Turn, and a little nearer. We're edging over finely. Here comes Smoky back."

"I won't do it," Coryell declared. "They might shoot you by mistake."

"Not they. You're not going to spoil my beautiful plan, not for a minute you aren't. Besides, Fatty—that nice fat man who stood up for you when they wanted to hang you—told auntie that here at the camp was your last chance. He says they mean business, those other Buck Snorters. He expects, if they take you to Buck Snort, you'll be hung before morning. He told auntie—"

"You mean Fatty Larkin said I was to slide out if I could?"

"Just that. I'm afraid the square deal wouldn't amount to much. He said he'd stand by you to the end, but he'd only be killed too. You see—ugh!"

Miss Rowland crossed a toe behind a heel and fell heavily—toward the gully. Coryell stooped to pick her up. Clinging to him she hopped on one foot, tucked up the other leg, and rubbed the ankle with her open palm.

"Only turned it," she said, and glanced past Coryell. The fall and the hopping had gained ground. The gully was not two yards distant. She looked up at him and set her jaw. Her handkerchief was crumpled in her left hand. She opened her fingers and let it fall.

"Look! Look!" she cried, her eyes round and horror-stricken.

Involuntarily he whirled to stare into the forest. A split-second later, Smoky threw a log on the fire, a Greener roared, and a lost soul shrieked terribly.

"Jump!" shouted Miss Rowland, as with all her young strength she shoved Coryell toward the gully.

He strove to check himself, to turn aside, but his center of gravity was not where it should have been. For an instant he balanced with wildly waving arms on the edge of the declivity, then down he went feet first, his spurred boot-heels tinkling among cans.

"Run! Run!" Miss Rowland was screaming at him from the bank above his head.

He waited a tense moment. But there were no shots, although of yells there was a surfeit. Then he ran.

"Damitall!" Piggy Question was almost weeping. "What didja go to fall all over me for, Fatty? I was just raisin' my rifle. I'd 'a' had him, when you come spraddlin' down an' knocked my rifle out o' my hands."

"Yo're crazy!" bawled Fatty Larkin. "You'd 'a' had him! Which you can't hit a flock o' wagon-covers flyin' low! But I'd 'a' had him if you hadn't got in my way an' tripped me, you slobbery lummo! Had my gun out, an' there you boosted up like a mountain grouse under my feet an' tripped

me. Oh, shut up! You gimme a pain! Why didn't you shoot, Sam?"

"I didn't dast for fear I'd drill the girl," replied Sam.

"Why didn't you take a chance?" raved Hawk-Face.

"I ain't shootin' no women," denied Practical Sam chivalrously.

"Nor nobody else in this crowd ain't," spoke up Tobe Haskins.

"Hell, no!" Thus other virtuous gentlemen in chorus.

"Didn't you know that gully was there, Sam?" Hawk-Face boiled over again.

"'Course I knowed it was there."

"Then for the love o' Gawd why didja let him get so close to it?"

"Well, it bein' night an' all, I sort of forgot about it, kind of."

"An' so did I forget about it," said Fatty Larkin. "An' Piggy Question too. You can see how the way the ground lays, an' them trees growin' like they do, they's a whole lot o' things easier to take notice of than that gully. For instance, we're all takin' notice how yo're a heap loud an' apparent fault-findin' after she's all over, but where was you before the riot, huh?"

"Last I seen he was takin' a short snooze down toward the river," Tobe Haskins answered with evident relish for Hawk-Face.

"When you might 't' been roostin' in that pet gully of yores all ready to glom onto him when he hopped in." Thus Fatty Larkin seriously.

"Aw hell," said Hawk-Face. "If I'd knowed—"

"But you didn't know." Light Laurie jumped into the discussion flatfooted. "It's tough luck, oh, yes, indeedy. You got my sympathy. You got all our sympathies."

"You stampeded our hosses, young feller," charged Hawk-Face, glad of a legitimate excuse to abandon his unprofitable argument with Fatty Larkin.

"I did not," denied Light Laurie. "Our hosses done it. But I wish I had stampeded 'em. I should say so. Kind of hard to catch 'em up again. Yeah. An' yo're the gent said you wasn't gonna have no hoss tied out in the woods for Bill to get away on. Say, it's a joke."

Mrs. Rowland stepped quietly between

the two men. "Light," she said, "I wish you'd take this shotgun over to the fire and clean it *now*. I'll stay with you and watch you do it."

Without a glance at Hawk-Face she herded Light Laurie out of temptation.

"I guess they ain't nothin' more we can do here," said Fatty Larkin. "It's a healthy walk to town, an' me, I'm startin' now."

"I wish their hosses hadn't all stampeded, too. I'd take— Say, how come they was unhobbled all ready to stampede when that shotgun went off? By Gawd—"

"Be a sport," advised Fatty Larkin, hitching up his pants. "The drinks are on us bad enough as it is. Don't make it no worse."

"No," said Hawk-Face, "I won't make it no worse—now. But when I get back to Buck Snort I'm gonna get me another horse an' I'm goin' out after this acrobatic Coryell young man an' I'm gonna get him if it takes forty years. An' anybody that wants in can go along. The show is free."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LOCK OF HAIR.

THE heavens were lightening to a splendid dawn when Coryell rode into the sleeping town of Hatchet and dismounted at the sheriff's corral. He strode to the kitchen door and beat upon it with his knuckles.

A wait of ten minutes, and a voice demanded: "Who's there?"

For be it known, an officer of the law as it is interpreted in the broken lands, does not open his door to chance pilgrims of the night. Not until he was satisfied that it was Coryell who stood without did Wat Pickett slide the bar through the staples.

In the kitchen, a lighted lamp between them on the table, Coryell told Wat of the death of Coombs, and what the Buck Snorters had tried to do in retaliation.

"They can't never get a warrant on the evidence," Pickett assured Coryell. "Judge wouldn't issue one on a bet. All they can do is lynch you."

"Which is most enough, an' more'n I

care about at that. Between Buck Snort an' the Slash K, I'm havin' a right lively time, an' I'm gettin' tired of it. I'm losin' cows, too."

"You ain't the only one." Dryly.

"Which don't make me no happier, not at all. I ain't in the business to lose money. Now I got a proposition to make, Wat. She's my main reason for comin' to you so early in the mornin'. The rustlers have gotta be dumped, ain't they?"

"Shore."

"All right, I'll do the dumpin'."

"You!"

"Why not me?"

"We-ell—"

"Aw, you ain't still thinkin'— My Gawd, I believe you are."

"Thinkin' what?"

"Thinkin' that I'm one o' the rustlers."

"I didn't say so."

"You don't have to. Lordy man alive, wake up an' hear the birds sing. You been asleep long enough."

"Lookit here—"

"No offense meant, Wat. I'm a tryin' to help you, only yuh won't see it."

"I don't need no help. Me an' my deputies are doin' all that's possible. I got reason to believe the rustlers will be downed or arrested within four weeks."

"Shore I know," nodded Coryell, not in the least impressed. "All I'm askin' of you is that you lemme have Luke Travis for about *two* weeks an' I'll show you somethin'."

"What have you found out?" Interestedly.

"Nothin' yet—not enough anyway."

"H-m. You know somethin'. What is it?"

"You think I'm a rustler," grinned Coryell. "You wouldn't believe what I told yuh."

"Try me."

"I ain't tellin' nothin' I get by hearsay an' mainstring. You let Luke Travis go with me like I say, an'—"

"My deputies are both busy alla time," the sheriff interrupted, shaking a tousled head.

"Come along yoreself then," invited Coryell.

"I guess I'll be busy too," said the sheriff.

"Aw right, do as you like. I'll take Light Laurie. Only reason I wanted Luke Travis or you is 'count o' yore bein' officers an' representin' the law thataway. I'll take Light Laurie instead like I say. All the help I'm askin' of you is that you keep yore mouth shut."

"Oh, I'll do *that*," nodded the sheriff, and yawned and stretched elaborately. "Where you thinkin' o' startin' in."

"Round the Slash K's as good as anywhere."

"'Tis if you wanna waste yore time."

"S where I'm gonna injun round alla same. There an' from Risin' Creek to the Kettle, I guess."

"When you startin'?"

"Right away—soon's I get word to Light. I'm pullin' out now."

"Stay to breakfast."

"Can't. Much obliged to yuh, but they's too much to do. See yuh later; so-long."

"So-long."

From the sheriff's house Coryell betook himself at once to a spot among the cottonwoods bordering the Hatchet River, from which he could view the junction of the Hatchet trail with that from the Slash K. Here he loosened cinches and picketed his horse to graze.

He made a tiny fire of the dry wood that gives off no smoke, set on coffee in a can to boil, and felt in his pocket for the knife wherewith to slice the bacon. There was an odd feel about the handle of the knife—as if it were wrapped in corn-silk, green, not dried.

He pulled out the knife and the corn-silk, and sat staring. For the corn-silk was the lock of Miss Rowland's hair that he had cut from her head when he dressed her wound the day before. Strands of the hair were caught beneath the closed blade. Near the severed end of the lock the hair was dark and stiff with dried blood. But the rest of it shone in the early sunlight with as bright a living fire as it ever displayed on her head.

Carefully, gently, that he might not break a single strand, Coryell opened the

blade and disentangled the caught hair. He smoothed the twisted lock across his knee, then went to the river with it and washed out the blood. Which being accomplished to his satisfaction, he spread it fanwise on a flat rock to dry, taking thought to weight the thick end with a stone.

"My Gawd," he muttered when the lock of hair was dry and he was wrapping it carefully in a green silk neckerchief that invariably rode in the off cantina under his extra shirt; "my Gawd, what a sappy dam-fool a man can be! First them violets an' now this."

He put the silk-wrapped lock in the breast pocket of his flannel shirt, but changed his mind and stuffed it instead into one of the pockets of his chaps and buttoned down the flap.

"This here shirt-pocket," he said gravely to his horse, as he drew the makings from the pocket in question, "would shore 'a' got that hair all smelly up with tobacco. An' that would never do."

An hour later he saw the sheriff loping along the Hatchet trail. The officer turned his mount into the Slash K trail.

"I knowed it," Coryell said aloud, regarding the dust-cloud that veiled the sheriff and his horse. "Just can't get to the Slash K too fast. Nawsir. Poor ol' Wat can't see much farther 'n the end of his eye-winkers. How Swing must laugh at him."

He slipped the bridle on his horse's head, buckled the throat-lash, and reached for a cinch-strap.

"An' the worst of it is, he's honest," he continued, making all tight. "He ain't got sense enough to be anythin' else."

Coryell swung up, forded the Hatchet, and rode westward at a singlefoot. In that direction lay the country watered by Canteen Creek. There were nesters living on Canteen Creek—a good many nesters.

Rebel Stanley, one of the Slash K's new riders, was holding forth to an audience in the Mint Saloon. His hearers were paying him flattering attention. He was paying for the drinks. Rebel Stanley's subject was the engrossing one of the rustler and his evil ways. Rebel Stanley was warming to it nobly. It may be that he was a little

drunk. Certainly he was indiscreet when he began to pepper his remarks with the name of Bill Coryell.

"I'm tellin' yuh," announced Rebel Stanley, "that son of a dog Bill Coryell has gone for good. He won't never dare show his pup face round here again. If he hadn't gone we'd 'a' hung him. We had the proofs on him proper. Fill 'em' up again, Sim. 'Tson me. Nobody can spend a nickel but yores truly *this* evenin'."

With another three fingers of Old Crow under his cartridge belts, Rebel Stanley waxed specifically loquacious.

"He certainly is slick," continued Rebel Stanley; "but some o' that L Up-an'-Down blottin' was coarse work. A kid could 'a' done better. Coryell must 'a' been drunk when he done it. Whatsamatter?"

The members of the audience standing nearest to him were pushing backward. They seemed to be in a fluster.

"Wha—" began Rebel Stanley, and choked, for a tough-muscled forearm had at that instant encircled his neck and jerked him backward even as a hand twitched one of his six-shooters from its holster and flung it away. He reached for his other six-shooter, and clutched instead some one's wrist. The weapon was wrenched out of the holster despite all Rebel Stanley could do, and tossed behind the bar. Then Rebel Stanley was twirled about and knocked spinning.

He fell on all fours against the wall and bumped his head and skinned his knuckles. Before he could recover his dazed wits an energetic individual began heartily to kick him—toward the doorway. A final terrific kick that jarred Rebel Stanley to the crown of his wicked head landed him on the sidewalk. He raised himself on an aching elbow and looked up at the man standing in the doorway.

"You talk too much," said Coryell dispassionately, and, turning about, made his way back to the bar.

Rebel Stanley's erstwhile audience stared with great interest. Knowing most of them, Coryell nodded briefly. But he asked none of them to drink at his expense. The bartender, lifting the bottle that he had set out for Coryell, swabbed the bar,

"Slow Baker's in town," said he in a low tone.

"She is a hot afternoon," nodded Coryell, his blue eyes hard as agate.

"Rebel Stanley said somethin' about his bein' down at the Engle House," amplified the bartender.

"Hotter'n yesterday."

"Looked to me like Rebel sifted off that-away—afterward."

"If we only had a li'l ice, huh?"

The bartender gave it up.

Coryell barely wetted his tongue with the liquor. He set down the glass and left the saloon by the back door.

Once outside he ran round a neighboring corral, threaded his way through a gathering of freight-wagons, cut in between the blacksmith shop and a stable and came out on Main Street diagonally across from the Engle House.

He was gratified to perceive on the sidewalk not more than thirty feet distant the back of Slow Baker. The Slash K man had drawn his gun. At a crouching, limber-kneed gait he was hurrying toward the Mint. That drawn six-shooter decided Coryell. Slow had not meant to give him a chance.

"Hi, Slow!" called Coryell. "You lookin' for somethin'?"

Whatever else may be said derogatory to the character of Slow Baker, it cannot be told that he lacked courage. At Coryell's shout he turned in a flash, his six-shooter spitting flame and smoke.

Unbiased spectators, and most of them were without prejudice, declared that both men fired together. Each fired three shots. But, while Coryell remained standing after the last shot, not so Slow Baker. He dropped his gun, sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and reached for the weapon with his left hand. Crack! Coryell's gun spoke again, and a bullet shattered simultaneously the bones of Slow Baker's left hand and the butt of his gun.

Slow Baker strove to arise. But his knees gave way beneath him and he tumbled sidewise. When they picked him up it was discovered that, besides the damage inflicted by the last shot, a bullet had bored

his right shoulder, another had smashed his right elbow.

"Bill missed once," said Bud Thompson.

"An' Slow every time," said Tom Jones, the county coroner, hitching up his pants and following with speculative eyes the group that was carrying Slow Baker into the Engle House.

He wasn't wishing any one bad luck, Tom Jones wasn't, but—well, the community could well afford to spare such boisterous citizens as Slow Baker, and the coroner's fee was twenty dollars.

"Where did Bill go?" queried Tom Jones suddenly.

"I seen him go round back of the Engle House," replied Bud.

"I thought I seen Rebel Stanley go in the Engle House just before Slow Baker come out."

"He went in," corroborated Bud Thompson.

"An' he ain't come out."

Decidedly, the coroner's round tone was pitched in a hopeful key.

Together the two friends skirmished cautiously to the rear of the Engle House. They were in time to see Rebel Stanley flit through the kitchen doorway and sprint madly toward Tom Jones's own stable a hundred yards away. Rebel was hatless, but he had contrived to pick up a rifle somewhere.

"My, but can't he run!" marveled Tom Jones.

"Regular quarter-hoss," concurred Bud Thompson.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Three spurts of dust spatted up about the flying feet of Rebel Stanley. The shots came from the kitchen doorway of the Engle House. To reach the comparative safety of the stable, Rebel Stanley had forty yards still to go. Ten yards to his left a discarded stove, legless, lidless and red with rust, squatted amid a litter of old tin cans and a few empty and gaping whisky-kegs.

Rebel Stanley dived headlong toward the stove and scabbled himself behind it just as another bullet cut the earth an inch from his right heel.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



Booberang

by

Keene Thompson

MR. ASA LITTLEBEAN readjusted the spectacles on his long, sun-burnt nose, and read for a second time what was unquestionably the most surprising letter he had ever received. The typewritten communication called attention to the fact that the residents of the rural districts no longer visited the cities nearest to their homesteads as frequently as of old.

Gone, or almost wholly vanished, from the pavements of the busy marts of trade was the carpetbag-laden tiller of the soil who was formerly to be observed there, craning his neck at the height of buildings and the burlesque theater bill-posters.

Nor was this to be wondered at. With motion-picture houses in continuous operation in every hamlet and crossroads settlement throughout the land, why should the farmer go to the expense of traveling a hundred miles and more to take in the scenes which he could view for only a five minutes' walk and at a cost of but ten or fifteen cents?

Did he pine for urban sounds as well as sights, there was the phonograph, without which the home of the least prosperous agriculturist was incomplete.

Modern progress had wrought the ancient miracle of bringing the mountain to Mohammed, in so far as it had placed the metropolis virtually at the rustic dweller's door-step.

And yet wasn't there one natural craving in the breast of the hard-working sower of the fields that the genius of Mr. Edison

had left unsatisfied—the desire to make an occasional investment of a few of his patiently hoarded-up dollars on the chance of acquiring millions?

Nowhere but in the crowded commercial centers could one hope to encounter a stranger who had found a handful of unset diamonds that he was willing to part with for twenty-five dollars in order to hasten to the bedside of a dying brother out of town. The opportunity to pick up at a bargain the controlling interest in a copper mine, or a little machine that received plain paper into it at one end and ground out brand-new five-dollar bills at the other, was likewise denied to the inhabitant of the bucolic regions who no longer went in search of such short cuts to wealth.

That is, unless the situation as it had previously existed were to be reversed. And why wasn't it only fair, since the plowman had so often journeyed in quest of those and similar ways of amassing a fortune overnight, that they should now be brought to him?

That it was manifestly the right thing to be done under the circumstances was the opinion of the writer of the letter afore-said. And he was therefore taking this means of acquainting the denizens of that town with the following facts:

Some time within the next few days a gentleman by the name of Jackson Webb was due to arrive. He would have with him as complete an assortment of engraved certificates of stock in various oil and

mining development companies, maps of the location of sunken treasure ships on the Spanish Main, gold bricks, and green goods of numerous denominations, as was anywhere to be found.

And all offered at prices that challenged comparison with the lowest quotations made to the speculatively inclined upon articles of the same nature in the past. Mr. Littlebean was respectfully requested to give the line the careful consideration which it merited and urge upon his friends the advisability of their doing likewise. Thanking him for all past and subsequent favors, the letter concluded with the signature of the secretary and first vice-president of the Amalgamated Bunco-Steerers of America.

"Waal, I swan!"

For at least five minutes Gaping Hollow's leading citizen sat with the epistle fluttering in his limp hands while he tried to think of some stronger form of expressing his astonishment.

"Waal, I swan!" he weakly acknowledged his inability to do so.

Rising from the porch of Higgsby's grocery and general store, which was also the post-office, he slapped the screen-door open and shut behind him.

"Be any of you able to tell me," he addressed the little knot of his fellow townsmen gathered, from force of habit, around the unlighted stove in the center of the store, "whether I bear any o' the signs of a person that's jest come down with an attack of gallopin' insanity?"

Old Zack Whimple, whose scraggy three-acre farm a mile outside of the village was security for his note at ten per cent interest which Mr. Littlebean held, stepped forward solicitously.

"Why, squire, you don't look no more'n usual as if you was out o' yer mind." He reddened, and swiftly corrected himself. "What I mean to say is, you 'pear to be all right—the pictur' o' health, fer yer age. What's wrong?"

"You've got one, too!" The local financier commented upon his discovery of the fact that the other was holding a type-written sheet of paper, a duplicate of the one in his hand. "You've all got a copy o'

the same thing!" he went on, as he looked around the group he had interrupted in the reading of their mail. "I know I ain't been suddenly bereft o' my senses then. But I know who is crazy—loony as a kite—an' that's the feller that wrote that letter!"

Llewellyn Tutt, the depot master, blew open the torn end of the plain white envelope he held and carelessly shoved his specimen of the singular missive back into it.

"Oh, I guess he knows what he's doin', all right," he remarked.

"Knows what—" The words died with a gurgle of amazement in Mr. Littlebean's throat. "Do you mean t' stand there an' tell me you think a confidence-man that 'ud send a notification like that beforehand to the folks he was aimin' to take in knows what he's doin'?"

"I said the party that perdooced this piece o' literchoor knowed what he was about," the station agent slowly and distinctly reiterated. "If I mentioned anything about his bein' a crook, I don't recerlect it. The thing's nothin' but a joke. An' by treatin' it serious, you're goin' the right way about it to help out the comical cuss that got it up to raise the laugh on us."

"Joke my grandmother's cat's foot!" Mr. Littlebean impatiently denied. "Ev'rybody livin' in this town, an' fer a few miles around it, from the way it looks, has had one o' them advertisin' dodgers mailed to him. You figger out the cost o' the paper an' envelopes, an' what the type-writin' 'ud come to, an' add the postage to it, an' let me know who you s'pose 'ud be likely to spend all that money fer the sake o' playin' a fool prank? There's somethin' more'n that in back of it."

"Jest as sure as you're alive!" warmly agreed the town's police force in a body—one hundred and ten pounds and six feet three inches of it, belonging exclusively to Cale Beasley. "I reckon I've had enough experience in dealin' with the criminal classes to know what I'm talkin' about. An' I give you all fair warnin' that you want to keep yer eyes open an' yer hand shut around yer pocketbook while you're talkin' to any stranger from now on, or you're

li'ble to lose one before you can blink the other. This varmint means exactly what he sez. Some member of his own thievin' clique, if he don't come himself, is goin' to show up here an' try to hornswoggle you, s'long as you've quit goin' where the snide-game workers hang out."

"But the durn fool don't think, does he," scornfully inquired Jeb Proutey, the hardware merchant, "that we'd bite on any o' the swindlin' contraptions he might bring with him? There's one reason why we don't go to the city no more that it seems like he's lost sight of. An' that's the same one that keeps the hen from hoppin' twice onto the kitchen range. Bein' bamboozled out o' some o' our money by havin' git-rich-quick schemes like them put up to us ev'ry time we've gone there fer a short vacation has fin'ly whaled the idea into our heads that we'd be better off in the long run by stayin' t' home. Leastways, that's been my experience. An' I reckon yours is about the same."

"S'posin' somebody was to turn up, though, with all them green an' brown an' lavender shares o' stock an' them clever counterfeit bills he speaks of here," suggested old man Whimple, a reminiscently avaricious glitter in his eyes; "I wonder how many of us 'ud be able to resist the temptation t' invest a triflin' mite o' cash in 'em, after all?"

"Mebbe you'd be idiot enough to fork over yer good dollars to a scamp fer what you knowed was nothin' but a lot o' trash," Mr. Littlebean contemptuously answered him, "but I calc'late nobody else would!"

At a touch on his shoulder he turned. A stranger, smiling, fat and forty, in a gray-check suit that obviously had not been chosen from a mail-order catalogue, was plucking the letter out of his hand.

"Would you mind letting me give this the once-over?" said he. "It sounds interesting."

While he scanned the sheet, Mr. Littlebean and his neighbors surveyed him—with suspicion, it must be confessed. Who was he? In those sporty clothes, and from his forward manner and slangy speech, he might be the very city sharper who had indited that note, or the representative of

the association of grafters soon due to pay a visit to the village.

"Well, you can toss in the sponge for me, after that!" the unknown announced, as he restored the typewritten sheet to Mr. Littlebean's gingerly outstretched hand. "It's a knockout; the nuttiest thing I ever read. I gathered, from as much of your talk as I overheard, that some slicker in the big burg was promising to come here and show you his new fall and winter line of Brazilian diamonds and phony kale. But I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

The statement was received in chilly silence. This was largely due to the vividness of the pantomime which Mr. Beasley was executing behind the intruder's back. Alternately pointing to the latter and grasping his own wrists, as though encircling them with a set of handcuffs, that conscientious guardian of the peace was reminding his beholders of the advice he had given them to regard with mistrust any and all persons with whom they were unacquainted.

And then Len Higgsby came out from behind his counter to perform the stranger's introduction.

"This here is Mr. Logan," he began.

"Grogan," prompted the other.

"To be shore—Dorgan, I should have said," amended the storekeeper, whose hearing was by no means as keen as it once had been. "He's sellin' a line o' canned goods fer a new concern in Chicago. I've told him I couldn't give him no order right away, on account o' me bein' all stocked up. We was chattin' about market prices, an' sech like, while he waited fer the next train goin' west, when the mail come in. 'Tain't no ways surprisin', I guess, that he was interested in hearin' you talkin' over what was in that letter. An' now that you've read it fer yerself," he turned to inquire of the stout individual at his side, "what d'ye make o' the thing?"

"It looks to me," the newcomer replied, with a friendly nod at Mr. Tutt, "as if somebody was trying to kid you, as our cousin here says."

"If you can imagine who that 'some-

body, is," Mr. Littlebean sourly observed, "you can do somethin' none of us is able to, seein' how we don't know a livin' soul in New York, from where this envelope's postmarked."

"Then I guess we'll have to hand you the big red apple," the drummer good-naturedly told him, "for coming through with the right answer in the first place. You said the party that framed up this thing was crazy. Maybe you've called the turn, at that. The con-men that ain't died of starvation or flung themselves off the ferry slips or under the trains in the terminals, where they used to lay in wait for you, may have worried themselves insane over the way their main source of support has been cut off. And they've taken this cracked notion to organize themselves into this flimflammers' union, or short-change artists' trust, with agents appointed to carry samples of their stock in trade around the country. That's the only other way I can see to account for it—the easy-money boys has simply gone cuckoo."

"Do you think," asked Mr. Prouty, "that there's a chance of one of 'em's really havin' the gall to show up here?"

The other seemed to be weighing the question in his mind, while he rubbed his smoothly shaven chin with the back of one plump white hand.

"There's no getting away from it," he said at last, "it cost dough to send out all them letters. It 'd be going too far to figure that the sure-thing players had gone out of their minds to the extent of throwing away any of their jack. So they might—mind you, I say *might*—carry out the threat they've made here, and have some one of their crowd pay you a call with a couple of suit-cases loaded with wildcat mining stock and gilded cobblestones." He chuckled and nudged Mr. Littlebean fraternally in the ribs. "I guess he'd find a warm welcome waiting for him—eh, old-timer?"

"As warm as b'ilin' tar feels when there ain't nothin' between it an' bare skin but a coat o' feathers!" the latter grimly assented.

"But you don't get me," hastily protest-

ed Mr. Grogan. "If a tin-horn was to follow up this advance notice by arriving in your midst with an assorted lot of queer tens and twenties and the rest of the grafters' bag of tricks, don't you see what a swell chance you'd stand of cleaning up a bunch of mazuma?"

"Cleanin' up a bunch o'—o' mazumy?" Mr. Littlebean falteringly repeated the words which had a welcome sound to his ears. "How so?"

"Why, it's as easy to tumble to as a pretty girl standing next to a banana peel!" declared the traveling salesman. "By buying up everything he had to offer you, of course."

"Let him swindle us!" incredulously blurted out the wayside capitalist.

"Let him think he was putting something over on you," the other patiently explained. "Listen: he throws you his line of bull about the way you can double and triple your money by investing it in his hokum goods, and you pretend to bite on it, see? Then, when you've bought him out, you can let him know where he stands. He either buys back all of his junk for more than you paid him for it, or he rides to jail on a rail, and in that suit of tar and feathers you spoke of, for skinning you. This is what he wrote, here's the very note, to prove he's a crook. He couldn't get away from that. You'd be able to shake him down for the exact size of the bank-roll he happened to be carrying—"

"Sacred skippin' shad!" ejaculated Mr. Littlebean under his breath. "We could turn the tables on him that way, fer a fact!"

"From where I sit, it looks as if you had a cinch here to pick up a few hundred dollars easier than you ever did before in your lives," the prosperous-looking outsider went on. "And the beauty of it is, you'd be knocking two birds dead with one rock by doing it. Besides putting some soft money into your pockets, you'd be taking sweet revenge on the wise guys that's trimmed you so often in the past. If one of 'em puts in an appearance, that is."

"If he only would!" prayerfully murmured Mr. Prouty.

"Mister, lemme shake you by the hand!" insisted old man Whimple, advancing to suit the action to the word. "You've got a head on yer shoulders that's useful fer somethin' besides holdin' yer hat! Thanks to you, we're goin' to sting this rapscallion good an' hard—"

"If he shows up," put in the station agent, moving toward the door as the melancholy hoot of a locomotive's whistle sounded in the distance. "Which it's dollars to dimes he won't. If you're goin' to make yer train," he advised the fat drummer, "you'd better come ahead."

Again the other appeared to hesitate.

"My route's covered, and I was only goin' on to Buffalo to lay off for a couple of days until I got further instructions from the home office," he said slowly. "But I can kill the time here just as well. On the level, I wouldn't miss the fun of seeing you hurl the harpoon into one of them Oily Jakes, if he did drop in on you, for a ten-spot. If there's no objections, I guess I'll stick around for a day or so—just to see if anybody does come along to make good on this tip you've got."

He, as well as the natives of the town, had not long to remain in suspense.

At noon on the following day the west-bound "accommodation" deposited on the depot platform a person who was immediately recognized by at least half of the male population of the village as an old, familiar, and decidedly unpopular acquaintance.

The plaid suit which he wore must have been cut from the original bolt of goods that had driven the Scotchman to the invention of the bagpipes as the only means of giving adequate expression to his feelings after beholding the bewildering pattern. The only difference between the stone in his bright red necktie and the Koh-i-noor was that the former was several carats larger. The silk hat tilted forward at a rakish angle on his jet-black hair, and the fat cigar with its gaudy band that protruded from under one curled and waxed end of his heavy, dyed mustache made him the bunco-steerer of the old Bowery and Fulton Street Ferry days, to the life.

The rapidly increasing crowd that followed him to Mel Phibbs's New Waldorf Hotel did not need to regard the signature "Jackson Webb," which the stranger inscribed with a bold flourish upon the register, to realize that the association of swindlers in the near-by metropolis had actually kept its word, and that its representative was here.

And yet where were all those contrivances for duping the unwary out of their laboriously accumulated nest-eggs that it had been promised he would have with him?

A vigorous "Whoa!" from the street, in Mr. Tutt's voice, suggested the answer to that question even as it rose in the minds of his neighbors. Followed a succession of heavy thumps on the sidewalk outside, suggestive of the opening of a barrage of seventy-fives during the late unpleasantness along the Marne. And then the station agent made his red-faced and perspiring appearance, bearing a huge, brass-bound trunk in his arms in his official capacity of baggagemaster and expressman.

Another trunk of the same size and seeming heaviness, two suit-cases, and a strapped and bulging black valise he carried into the lobby in turn. This frankly advertised rascal must have brought with him every swindling device that had ever been used since the first grafter was born.

"Got a sample room?" he briskly inquired of the hotel proprietor.

The latter swallowed nervously and nodded.

"Then you can consider it engaged for the afternoon," Mr. Webb informed him in the same curt, businesslike tone. "Shake yourself awake now, boy!" he sharply admonished Mr. Tutt. "I've only got three hundred and sixty-four and a half days less than a year to spend in this town. Get the boss here to show you where I can open up them grips and trunks so's I can display the stuff that's in 'em." Then, turning to his spellbound audience at the other end of the hotel desk: "Gimme just ten minutes, gents," he requested, "and I'll be all ready to open shop!"

Picking up one suit-case and the black

leather satchel, he walked toward the door of the room which the hotel keeper was holding open at the other side of the lobby. And Mr. Tutt, wearing the fixed and vacant expression of the victim in a two-reel comedy just after he has been knocked on the head with a fifty-pound mallet, obediently bumped one of the trunks across the floor in his wake.

A second after he had carried the last of the newcomer's baggage into the room, the depot master reappeared across its threshold—with an appearance that he had been pushed—and the door was closed and locked in his face.

"What's he up to now?" Mr. Prouty eagerly questioned.

Twice Mr. Tutt opened his mouth to say something, before he could shake off the paralysis which amazement had laid upon his vocal chords.

"Search me!" he huskily confessed. "But whatever it is, 'twon't surprise me any—nothin' short o' seein' Christopher Columbus an' Lydia Pinkham come walkin' in here, arm in arm, could do that now!"

The drummer for the nameless canned goods house in Chicago advanced from the street doorway.

"I'll admit that this is a full city block beyond the limit!" he informed the station agent and the others. "But you want to pull yourselves together now—don't look so startled. Act as if you was glad of the chance this wise bird's coming here has given you to pick up a few wads of imitation bills and nuggets of solid gold at cut rates. You've got to make him think you're the boobs he's got you sized up for, remember, or you won't be able to put your game over on him. Now, go to it!" he finished in a hasty undertone.

The door across the lobby had swung back, revealing Mr. Webb posed in an attitude of welcome on its threshold.

"All set, folks!" he announced.

Slowly the citizenry of the rural community filed into the room. Their jaws sagged open at the sight which met their eyes. Sawdust covered the floor. Sporting prints and the photographs of popular members of the Black Crook Chorus were

tacked upon the walls. From one end of the counter that extended across the rear of the room a phonograph of a cheap and inferior make was rendering a sentimental ballad nasally through its cracked tin horn.

Only the rows of bottles and glassware were lacking to complete the illusion which the place otherwise gave of being a saloon on Second Avenue or Fourteenth Street in the glad, free days of the nineties. Here was the city brought to the countryman, in all reality!

Tastefully arranged on the table in the middle of the floor were stacks of multi-hued stock certificates, rolls and packages of green and yellow backed counterfeit bills, glittering golden bricks, and enough jewels, both mounted and unset, to have ransomed a half-dozen dukes and princes—if they had been genuine.

"Look 'em over, friends!" the confidence-man unblushingly invited. "That's what they're here for!"

Mr. Littlebean turned his head in response to a tug at his coat-tails.

"Ain't you forgetting what *you're* here for?" whispered the traveling salesman. "Start buying his junk—the sooner you clean him out of his stock, the quicker you'll be able to frisk him for his roll as the price of his keeping out of the hoose-gow."

The local captain of finance picked up a bundle of spurious five-dollar bills and approached the grafter.

"How much?" he asked succinctly.

"Do you mean you want to buy 'em?" inquired Mr. Webb.

Mr. Littlebean nodded.

"Well, I guess the sight of twenty dollars in regular cash 'd cause me to stifle any pangs of regret at parting with 'em," the other announced; "and you'll be getting a bargain at that."

The ball which Mr. Littlebean had thus started rolling was kept in continuous motion by his neighbors for the next five minutes. After which Mr. Webb had nothing left to sell—or so it seemed.

"And now, gents, I want to show you something that's really worth buying!" he corrected that false impression, rising be-

hind the counter at the rear of the room to which he had briskly stepped, a set of four calf-bound volumes in his hands. "Something that 'll give you a lifetime of enjoyment and a liberal education in the way the government of your country is being run. The speeches of the statesmen and Presidents of the United States. That's what I've got here—"

"Say, we don't care nothin' about that!" Mr. Littlebean aggressively broke in upon him. "You're a crook, an' the only way you can keep us from sendin' you to State's prison fer stickin' us with the trash we've jest bought from you is by buyin' it all back fer jest double what we paid you—"

"Hold on!" Mr. Webb checked him in turn. "You said you bought the stuff from me, and you tooted a hornful! I didn't offer to sell it to you, did I? As long as you was willing to take my display off my hands, I didn't have any objections to taking your money for it. I was going to throw it away, anyhow, havin' no further use for the advertisement—"

"Wh-what do you mean?" Mr. Littlebean spluttered, his eyes bulging wildly from his ashen face. "You come here to rope us in with the truck, didn't you? 'Tain't goin' to do you a mite o' good to deny it. Here's this letter you wrote, which convicts you in black and white of bein' a scoundrel—"

"Do you think anybody with one-tenth of a grain of common sense 'd think it really meant what it said?" the other scornfully interrupted. "That's the form letter I always send out ahead of my arrival in a town. It's to create interest in my coming. Then I follow it up with an exhibition of the grafters' stock in trade that I've picked up at odd times. Us book-agents has got to resort to something off the beaten track in order to draw an audience. This trick has worked out pretty successfully for me in the past six or seven months. When I've sold you the last dozen sets of this here wonderful work out of the carload I started out with—"

"We don't want yer books!" snarled Mr. Littlebean.

He and his fellow townsmen had been tricked out of their money, after all. Of course the rascal was just that, and not a book-agent as he claimed—but what could they do about it? In their eagerness to sting him, they had bought out his stock of bogus articles without waiting for him to try to sell them, and so been stung themselves.

"Whether you want 'em or not, you're each one of you going to take a set, just the same!" Mr. Jackson Webb confidently informed them. "And I'll tell you why. There don't any of you want to land in State's prison yourselves, do you? Well, that's where I can send you. All of you have got counterfeit money in your possession. That's illegal. If you want to make me forget that I know you've broken the law, there's one way, and only one, that you can do it. Each and every one of you come across with thirteen dollars and fifty cents for a set of these books. And do it lively!"

Fifteen minutes later Mr. Littlebean flung down in disgust the first volume of the speeches of the statesmen and Presidents of the United States that he, as well as his neighbors, had been forced to acquire through the miscarriage of their attempt to rope in the professional swindler.

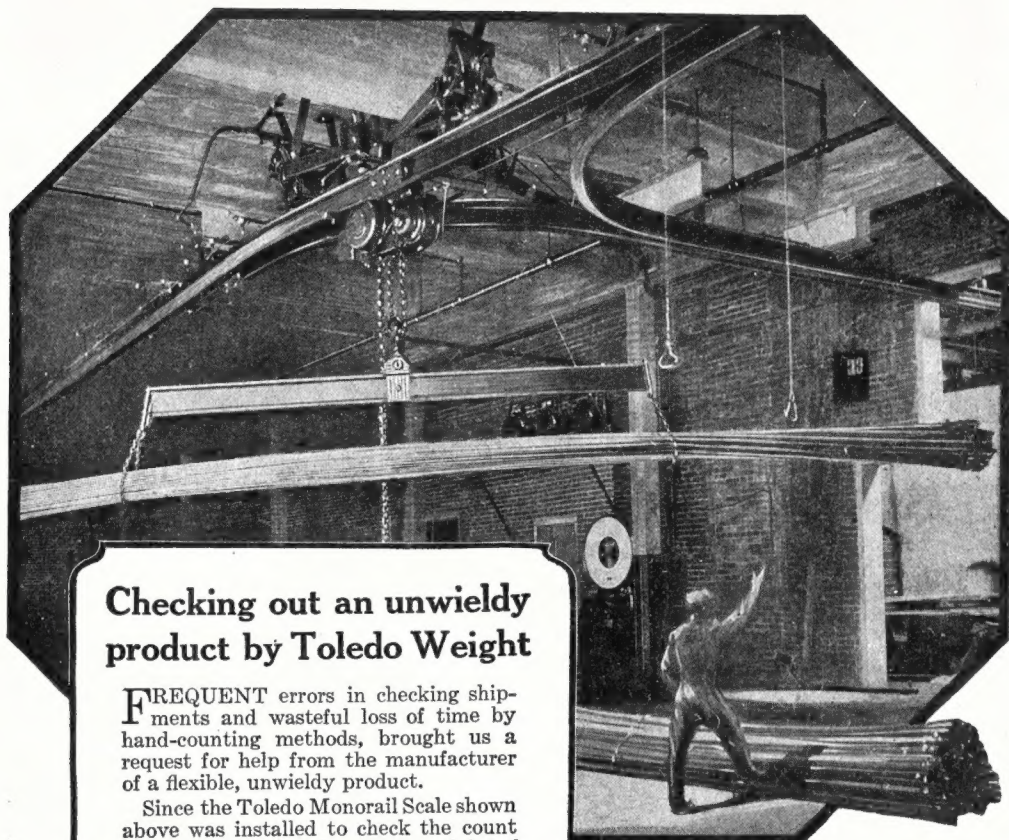
"Do you know what these books is?" he demanded of his neighbors. "Nothin' but old numbers o' the Congressional Record!"

Mr. Prouty nodded glumly.

"We've showed ourselves to be a fine passel o' fools," said he. "If we wasn't dead from the neck up, we might 'a' knowed that fat feller who showed us how we could take advantage of a grafter was actin' in cahoots with him—as he proved by duckin' out o' town with him on the three-twenty train while we was huntin' fer him."

Mr. Littlebean kicked the book across the floor.

"It's a durn good thing we *don't* go to the city no more," said he; "not when they're breedin' crooks there that's as clever as them two was."



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